CURLEY: CROW SCOUT FOR CUSTER

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ABSTRACT

At the height of the great Sioux war, a young Crow warrior named Curley unknowingly and unintentionally became one of the most famous figures to emerge from that era. He enlisted to serve as a scout for the United States army as they attempted to subdue the Sioux. On June 25, 1876 he emerged from the Battle of the Little Bighorn as the sole survivor of the command under General George Custer. From that point on he has been labeled both a hero and a coward for his actions. America embraced the young Crow scout, but later was viewed as a traitor for helping the army in defeating the Sioux. He was also viewed as a coward for leaving the battle and not fighting with the soldiers. Throughout his life he maintained that he did nothing great, and left when ordered to do so.

Unfortunately, this was all Curley was known for throughout the remainder of his fascinating life. The purpose of this thesis is to present an aspect of Curley that shows who he really was. He grew up in a time filled with violence. He witnessed the destruction of the buffalo, which ultimately resulted in a way of life ending. Through it all he managed to be a leader among his people and represented his people well. He continually fought for the rights of his people and was adamant about not losing any more land to the whites.

Curley became a model for the new age warrior, fighting not in the field but in the courtroom. He managed to help the Crow people remain unified as they entered an era when many different nations were forced out of their traditional hunting grounds. Curley was the sole survivor of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but also should be viewed as a hero for his actions later in his life.

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CHAPTER I – CURLEY THE CROW INDIAN

Whenever the name "Curley" is mentioned, most people associate it with General George Armstrong Custer and the Battle of the Little Bighorn. What many people do not realize is that that there is much more to Curley's life than this single incident. The purpose of this M.A. thesis is to present a biography of Curley, a man famous among his Crow people, and show that he was significant beyond the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

His road to fame began after he served as a scout at the Little Bighorn and emerged as the sole survivor of Custer's command. As a result, the press, and America in general, became obsessed with his version of the battle. He was interviewed frequently and in great depth about the fight. He was an honored guest in numerous parades and gatherings. However, from the time of the battle, until his death, Curley maintained that he "did nothing great." He simply left the battlefield when he was ordered to do so. Yet he was viewed as a hero. Eventually, Curley quit denying his heroic acts in the battle, but controversy always seemed to follow him, even after his death.[1] Another thing most people do not realize about Curley was that during his lifetime, he fought two major battles: one against the Sioux and later one against the white men who wanted his land.

In reality, Curley should be viewed as a hero because he, unlike many other Indians, made the transition from plains warrior to reservation warrior in a brief amount of time. Two-Leggings, a Crow warrior around this time stated: "Nothing happened after that. We just lived. There were no more war parties, no more capturing of horses from

the Piegans and Sioux, no buffalo to hunt. There is nothing more to tell."[2] What Two Leggings was referring to was the new life on the reservations, which many men of the Crow People had a difficult time accepting. Only a few men such as Plenty Coups and Curley made the transition to become this "new age warrior." This warrior was different and unique, which set him apart from the previous warriors. The old warrior fought on the fields of battle, while the "new age" warrior battled for his people in the courtrooms of the white man. To better understand Curley, it is imperative that one first understand the culture that created him. A culture filled with both hardship and loyalty, the culture of the Crow Indians.

THE CROW INDIANS

The Crow people referred to themselves as "Apsalooke," meaning "Children of the Large Beak Bird."[3] Crow oral history suggests that the term does not refer to the raven but rather to a bird that no longer exists. According to Crow elders, such as Arthur Big Man, "Absuraka" referred to a bird once found in what is now Nebraska and Kansas. The bird was similar to a magpie or a blue jay, but was definitely not a raven.[4]

Once an eastern woodland people, the soon to be Crow Nation migrated onto the northern plains around the sixteenth century to become hunter/gatherers.[5] They soon came to rely heavily on the great herds of buffalo for their survival. The Crows trace their

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[1] Thomas B. Marquis stated that Curley maintained that he was not in the battle, and that maybe he altogether quit denying the false stories pertaining to his role in it. See Thomas B. Marquis, *Rain-In-The-Face and Curley, the Crow* (Montana: Custer Battle Museum, 1934), 8.
[2] Peter Nabakov, *Two Leggings: The making of a Crow Warrior,* with a forward by John C. Ewers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 197.
[3] Robert H. Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (New York: Irvington Publishers Inc., 1956), 3; William Marshall Anderson, a trader who met the Crows in 1833 also noted that the Crows referred to themselves as "Absorokees." See William Marshall Anderson, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson,* Dale Morgan and Eleanor Towels Harris, eds. (California: The Huntington Library, 1967), 138.
[4] Arthur Big Man, Interview, 1992.
[5] Nabakov, *Two Leggings,* viii.

recent origins as a people to the village-dwelling Hidatsas who lived in settlements on the Knife River, on the Missouri River in North Dakota.[6] After splitting from the village dwelling Hidatsas, the Crows assumed a separate identity.[7]

The Crow migration story is a fascinating one, which was told around Crow campfires during the pre-reservation days. Curley probably heard the story while he was growing up. It tells of the move from the woodlands to the plains. Recently the migration story has been compiled and documented by Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow. Dr. Medicine Crow is today about 86 years of age and has served as tribal historian for the Crows since 1946. The origin story compiled and told by Joe Medicine Crow may be summarized as follows:

> "The Crow were woodland Indians who planted corn and squash when they lived south of Lake Superior and east of Lake Michigan. They hunted the game and enjoyed life in a land filled with a variety of wild life, fruits, berries, and nuts. But one year, according to legend, the rains did not come. The hot winds began blowing continuously and soon the green earth was parched to brown. The corn and squash could not be planted. The buffalo retreated and the tribe became hungry. The men of the tribe were called together to decide what to do. They decided to send teams of 14 men to each of the four directions in search of game. When the men returned from the north they reported that they saw nothing. It was the same for those who had gone to the east and to the south. But when the men from the west returned, they brought back buffalo meat, each man carrying all that he could. After all had eaten, the men were asked to make their report. They said that many days to the west they finally came out of the woods. There they found many buffalo on the open plains and meadows. There was good grass and good water. After hearing the report, the Chief made the decision to move toward the land of the setting sun. Crow historians believe that the Crow finally caught up with the buffalo somewhere near the present location of St. Paul, Minnesota. From their new home in Minnesota, the Crow people began to wander toward the north. They spent some time ranging from northern Minnesota to the Winnipeg area of Canada, a land filled with lakes and bush. Here the crow lived in two separate groups. In the winter they dwelt in their earthen lodges in meadows of the valleys. During the summers some of the people would head west to hunt buffalo, while others farmed. Then, apparently, the group split into two different

[6] Alice B. Kehoe, *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 298.
[7] Lowie, *The Crow Indians,* xiv.

bands. One group of people wanted to return to the north, while others wanted to stay or go on. The leaders of the respective divisions were brothers named No-Vitals and Red Scout. They decided to fast, to seek direction from the Great Spirit as to the direction the tribe should take. When they returned from their pilgrimages, Red Scout had an ear of corn. He related that it had been given to him by the Great Spirit as his staff of life. Red Scout had been told that he could go anywhere and the corn would grow. No-Vitals had seeds that he had been given by the Great Spirit. He declared that the seeds were not for his body, but for his soul; that he would go to the mountains where the Great Spirit would show him the ways to plant the sacred seeds. He declared that as long as he planted the seeds of tobacco, the people would populate, be healthy and rich, and that they would find a good country in which to live. The people under No-Vitals now packed up their possessions and began to walk toward the west, using travois attached to their dogs to help bear the load. Soon they came to the shores of the Missouri River near its junction with the Heart River. As they looked across the river, they saw a number of earthen lodges that housed a tribe called the Mandan. The Mandans, seeing the arrival of the ancestral Crow, took to their bullboats and paddled toward them. They helped transport the newcomers across the river, where they kept and cared for them about a year. After living in the valley along the Missouri for about seven years, the Crow began to move north. They came to the Knife River, a distance for of about 17 miles from their former home. Once more the migrants faced the pressures of starvation. The buffalo had left once again and most of the white-tailed deer were gone. As was the custom, the men once again were sent out to each of the four directions to see what they could find. Only one buffalo had been found. The meat was to be shared so that all might get at least one bite. While No-Vitals was in council with his men, his wife came to him crying that she did not get much meat from the buffalo that was found. No-Vitals, upon hearing the complaint from his wife, called for the crier to notify the people that in the spring, he, No-Vitals, would be moving. Those who wanted to leave with him would be welcome to come along. It was sometime between 1600-1625."[8]

No-Vitals thus lead his band to the area where they eventually settled. This band then referred to themselves as "Biluke," or "Our Side" according to Dr. Medicine Crow.[9] An annual ceremony is held in which the Crows celebrate the planting of the tobacco

[8] Tim Smells, Interview, February 2000; Gerald Reed, Interview, February 2000.
[9] Dennis W. Harcey and Brian R. Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him: Crow Scout with Custer* (Illinois: Evanston Publishers, Inc., 1995), 13-17.

seeds, as seen in No-Vitals vision. The planting of the tobacco also represents the desire of the Crows to grow and flourish as a people.[10]

From this time forward the Crows became a tribe of their own, and gradually their language began to diverge from their cousins the Hidatsas. Anthropologists distinguish the Crows from other tribes according to the different dialects in their language. The Crows have been classified as Siouan speakers, different from the Blackfoot and Cheyenne tribes, but related to the Sioux. However, this grouping of the tribes according to language similarities does not mean that they could understand each other, although it does suggest that at one time they were one band.[11]

Eventually, other tribes began moving onto the northern plains much like the Crows, and soon all came to be known as Plains Indians. Like the Crows, many of the tribes that migrated to the northern plains were once woodland tribes, such as the Blackfoot and Cheyenne. According to archaeologists such as Robert H. Lowie, the term plains is difficult to explain. Lowie describes it like so: "The term 'plains' is a geographical term that may be construed loosely to include the area between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains, along with adjacent parts of Canada. Sometimes it is limited so as to exclude the 'Prairie' belt. However, it is not possible to apply the narrower definition in a strict sense. The Plains proper are supposed to be marked off by their short-grass vegetation, a result of aridity; and the Prairie soil is allegedly distinguishable by its dark color. Still, neither of these criteria is absolute."[12]

These newly arrived tribes quickly became dependent on the herds of buffalo. The buffalo became an important part of the Indians life, providing food, clothing, and

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[10] Lowie, *Crow Indians,* 274.
[11] Robert H. Lowie, *Indians of the Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 5.

shelter. The Indians utilized a major portion of the buffalo. For example, the head was used in ceremonies such as the sacred Sundance. Buffalo meat was usually boiled or dried, which preserved the nutrients for long periods of time. The sinew was used as bowstrings or thread used in attaching hides together to make the tepee coverings. The hooves were melted and used as glue for securing arrowheads to shafts. It also provided clothing and shelter for the nomadic people. [13]

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Crows were securely nestled in the Yellowstone, Bighorn, and Little Bighorn valleys.[14] In 1743, the La Verendryes brothers became the first of whites to encounter the Crows.[15] The La Verendryes were in the process of exploring the north, and possibly setting up trading posts for France.[16] The French brothers were greatly impressed with the appearance of the Crows, and referred to them as "Beaux Hommes," or the handsome men.[17] Another fur trapper and trader named William Marshall Anderson who visited the Crows a century later was also greatly impressed with the appearance of the Crows. He wrote in his journal about how the Crows, "possess many eloquent men."[18]

After the La Verendryes in 1743, no records for the next fifty years suggest that the Crows had any further contact with European Americans. During this time, the Crows probably lived a rather peaceful life in some of the most beautiful country in the

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[12] *Ibid,* 1.
[13] Lowie, *Plains Indians,* 13; Hannah Morrison, Interview, 2000.
[14] Joe Medicine Crow. *From the Heart of the Crow Country: The Crows Indians own Stories* (New York: Orion Books, 1992), 2.
[15] Francois Antoine Larocque, *Yellowstone Journal,* in W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D Thiessen, eds. *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders Among the Mandan and the Hidatsa Indians,* 1738-1818 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), Table 1, Appendix. Table shows Travels of traders into Big Horn Mountains, Where Crows were located. Also see G. Hubert Smith, *The Explorations of the La Verendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43,* W. Raymond Wood, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 106.
[16] Smith, *The Exploration of the La Verendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43*, 1.

world. During the summer months the Crows more than likely spent their time hunting buffalo along beautiful clear rivers such as the Big River (Missouri) and the Elk River (Yellowstone). They spent their summers gathering roots and berries in some of the highest mountain peaks on the northern plains. Young men probably climbed high into mountains like the Beartooth and the Bighorns to fast and receive guidance from the Great Above Person.[19]

The next recorded white visitor to the Crows was a Frenchman named Francois Antoine Larocque.[20] In his journal he noted that the Crows were split into three distinct political groups, which were the River Crow, Mountain Crow and the Kicked in Their Bellies. Larocque wrote, "There are three principal tribes of them whose names in their own language are *Apsarechas*, *Kee the resas*, and *Ashcabeaber.*"[21] The River Crows generally lived in the area between the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. The Mountain Crows, the most numerous of the bands, lived in the area between the Bighorn Mountains and the Yellowstone River. They constantly traveled across the Bighorn and Beartooth Mountain ranges to visit and trade with the Shoshone and Nez Perces.[22] The third band, by far the least numerous, were the Kicked-In-Their-Bellies. They were found in the Wind River area but lived the majority of the year with the Mountain Crows.[23]

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[17] *Ibid,* 106.
[18] Anderson, *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson,* 199.
[19] Lowie, *Crow Indians.* 239; Nabakov, *Two Legging,* 23-27; Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 57-67.
[20] In Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade, 169-170.*
[21] *Ibid,* 206. What Larocque was in fact referring to in the first word *Apsarechas* is actually *Absuraka,* which means Children of the large beaked bird. The other two refer, probably to the main group, the River Crow and the Mountain Crow. The third distinct band, the Kicked-In-The-Bellies was usually small in numbers often joining the Mountain Crow band. For detailed information on the bands see Lowie, *Crow Indians,* 3-5.
[22] Mardell Plainfeather, "A Personal look at Curley's Life After the Battle of the Little Big Horn," *Greasy Grass,* vol. 4 (May, 1988), 18.
[23] Lowie, *Crow Indians,* 4.

During the latter part of the seventeenth, and earlier part of the eighteenth centuries, life began changing for the Crows because of three major introductions onto the plains. The first was the arrival of the horse, sometime in the early part of the century. It is highly probable that the Crows obtained the horse through trade from their neighbors the Shoshone.[24] The "Horse Culture," period according to anthropologists stretches from the acquisition of the horse to the end of the buffalo days.[25] Eventually the Crows became intermediaries in the horse trade on the northern plains.[26] The introduction of the horse onto the plains marked a dramatic change for the nomadic people of the region.

The Crows quickly adopted the animal into their society. By the early part of the nineteenth century, the Crows were well adapted to the horse. Francois Larocque observed, "Everybody rides, men, women and children. The females ride astride as men do. A child that is too young to keep in [his] saddle is tied to it...he...gallops or trots the whole day if the occasion requires."[27]

The introduction of the gun also contributed to altering the lifestyle of the Crows as well as other Plains Indians.[28] The gun took warfare and hunting to another level. The Plains Indians could now hunt the buffalo more effectively, without much injury to the hunters. Warfare became more violent as well as more frequent.

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[24] John C. Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture: With comparative Material From Other Western Tribes, Smithsonian Institute Bureau of American Ethnology No. 159* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), 8. Ewers, however, believes that the Crow obtained the horse about 1762, but according to the La Verendrys, Crows had horses when he met them in 1743. See Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade,* 170.
[25] *Ibid,* 2.
[26] Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture,* 7.
[27] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade,* 213.
[28] For the spread of the gun onto the plains, see Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns on the Plains* (New York: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1953), 65-69; Collin Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 277-78.

However, the most significant factor to alter life for the Crows was marked by the arrival of the Sioux. The warlike Sioux became permanent neighbors, frequently making war against the Crows.[29] They were obviously lured onto the plains because of the great herds of buffalo, and the market for the hides.[30] The arrival of the Sioux marked the beginning of a one-hundred-and-fifty-year struggle, which ended only when the Sioux had been forced onto reservations in the late 1870's.

By the time of the Crow scout Curley's birth in 1859, the Crows were engaged in an all-out war with the Sioux and many of the other surrounding tribes. Plenty Coups informed Frank Linderman that the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahos pushed the Crows from the Black Hills stating: "Until finally when I was a young man we were mostly in the country of the Bighorn and Little Bighorn rivers." [31]

Because of constant warfare between the tribes, many whites that visited the Crows predicted that they would become extinct because of it. Edwin Thomas Denig, a representative of the American Fur Company who traded with the Crows remarked, "Situated as they are now, the Crows cannot exist long as a nation. Without adequate supplies of arms and ammunition, warred against the Blackfeet on one side and most bands of the Sioux on the other."[32] Because of the constant warfare the Crows found themselves to be increasingly a warlike people, forcing them to raise the males of the tribe, such as Curley, to become warriors. These males were willing to give their lives in order to defend the beautiful country they called home. Many of them believed that the

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[29] Richard White, "The Winning of the West: the Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", Journal of American History 65 (September 1978), 321.
[30] *Ibid,* 322.
[31] Frank B. Linderman, *Plenty Coups: Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 49.
[32] Edwin Thomas Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri,* edited with an introduction by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 71.

Great Above Person had placed them in just the right spot.[33] In the early part of the nineteenth century, Arapooish (Rotten Belly), a Crow Chief expressed the feeling of the Crows when he stated:

> "The Crow country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place; while you are in it you fare well; whenever you go out of it, whichever way you travel, you fare worse."[34]

Throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century, it became apparent that the Crows had to fight to hold their country and to protect themselves from repeated incursions from surrounding tribes. Caught between the powerful Sioux on the east and the aggressive Blackfeet tribes on the north, the Crow found themselves in the most desperate military position of any Upper Missouri tribe. From the arrival of the painter George Catlin (1832), white traders who knew the Crow solemnly predicted, "that the Crows would be annihilated by their more numerous enemies." So frequent were Blackfoot and Sioux raids during mid-century that fur traders abandoned their fortified posts in the Crow country. Not even the stubborn greedy traders attempted to stay and trade in the chaotic country of the Crows.[35] Fortunately, the Crow were able to hold off the attackers, but not without great losses.

The survival of the Crows during this time can be attributed to many factors. The main reason was because the Crow people were able to adhere to a strict political structure. The "Batse tse," or, overall chief was one that was experienced in life on the plains. This man was recognized as a leader because of his accomplishments in battle. In order to achieve the status of chief, one had to successfully complete four

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[33] Joseph Smells, Interview, 1999.
[34] Medicine Crow, *From the Heart of the Crow Country,* xxi-xxii.
[35] Nabokov, *Two-Leggings,* vii-viii.

requirements.[36] The first requirement was to lead a successful raid against the enemy. A successful raid was one in which the warrior fought the enemy without losing any of his fellow warriors. The second task required that a warrior had to capture a picketed horse within a hostile camp. Many of the plains warriors protected their prize mounts. As a result, many warriors would picket their horse next to their tepee at night. This allowed them to keep a constant watch over their prize horse.[37] The third was to count coup, or touch an enemy with a coup stick. During battle, a warrior had to strike an enemy, dead or alive, in order to count coup.[38] The final requirement to become a chief was to take an enemy's gun or bow during a fight. If a warrior completed the four requirements, and was witnessed by other warriors, he was considered a chief among his people.[39] However, completion of these tasks did not insure that a warrior automatically became the head chief. The experience that the Chief gained was invaluable in becoming a leader, and also for the survival of the Crows.

Once he accomplished the four tasks, the individual was now entitled to sit in the council of chiefs. The council was made up of all the chiefs of the band and the members served as advisors to the head chief. Once a man became a head chief he carried the title until he voluntarily resigned his position. Lone Tree, a Crow warrior explained that a camp chief served as long as the tribe enjoyed good luck under him. If the camp began experiencing bad luck in hunting or warfare, they usually blamed the head chief and forced him out. Another council member immediately filled the vacant position. The

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[36] Lowie, *Crow Indians, 5.*
[37] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 19.
[38] Most warriors did not necessarily have a coup stick, but used any object such as their bow or gun as a coup stick. Plenty Coups explained that in order to count coups a warrior must strike an enemy with his coups stick. He explained that each man had his own coups stick, and warrior societies also had their own preferences. See Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 54-56.
[39] Lowie, *Crow Indians,* 5-6.

head chief was responsible for deciding when to move the camp and where to move it. He usually sent scouts out in different directions to find game, and once the chief received the desired reports, he would order the camp crier to tell the people. However, the head chief was neither a ruler nor a judge, and he had no power over life or death.[40]

The camp crier was basically the aide to the head chief, and was greatly trusted by him. The crier was responsible for keeping the camp informed of any and all necessary news for the day. According to Robert Lowie's Crow informants, "the camp crier's duty was to report the news of the day or deliver messages from the head chief. He would ride through the circle of lodges reporting aloud any matters of public interest, summoning the aged to a feast at some hospitable lodge, announcing the disappearance of some tribesman or warning of the approach of a battle. Sometime he explicitly appeared as the chief's mouthpiece, prefacing his proclamation with the statement that he was voicing the chiefs judgment. Before an engagement he encouraged the Crow, proclaimed the chief's orders, exhibited young warriors where all could see them, and eulogized them before the assembled throng." The informants said that a crier was a man of distinction, being chosen most probably as the leader of a lucky war party. However, during the early years of the reservation period many of the elders became critical of the selections of camp criers. White-Man-Runs-Him, a noted scout with Custer, was selected as a camp crier in 1911 because of his notoriety. Many elders commented that in the old days he would not have been selected for this position.[41]

The next political body under the camp crier involved the warrior societies. During the days when the Crows were constantly at war with the surrounding tribes, most men

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[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid.*

belonged to warrior societies. There were eight different warrior societies that included the Bulls, Prairie-foxes, Ravens, Half-shaved Heads, Lumpwoods, Stone Hammers, Little Dogs and Big Dogs.[42] These societies were responsible for a variety of tasks concerning the tribe as a whole. Thomas LeForge noted, "These policeman enforced all camp rules or rules of the march. They restrained anxious ones who might rush prematurely forward when a body of hunters was stalking game. They held back, likewise, whatever warriors in time of battle might put the general plan out of adjustment by hasty or inconsiderate action in an effort to gain personal glory or advantage. In every way the dog-soldiers were the immediate directors of conduct.[43] None of the clubs were in any sense a religious fraternity for their activities were social and military. Each spring the camp chief appointed one of the societies to serve as police. They were responsible for the protection of the camp, often appointing guards on a nightly basis.

Francois Larocque also made an observation of the duties of the societies. He noted: "The hunting matches are regulated by a band of young men who have much authority."[44] He also observed the punishment of people who did not follow the rules stating: "Those who behave refractory to their orders are punished by a beating or their arms are broken or their tents cut to pieces.[45] It was because of the harshness of the punishment that most people did not commit major offences.

Most warriors usually joined warrior societies because their brothers were members. In some cases, infant boys were promised to societies to fill the vacancy of an

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[42] Lowie, *Crow Indians,* 172-174.
[43] Thomas LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 146.
[44] Wood and Thiessen, *Early fur trade, 209-210.*
[45] *Ibid,* 210.

older brother who had been killed in battle. Once they joined they usually were members for life, unless another society recruited them with bribes, such as horses.[46]

Each club had its own distinctive regalia, decoration, dance, and peculiarities of behavior. The leaders of the different clubs were usually elected because they promised to be brave in battle. They were then required to wear or carry specific regalia, which represented a person's status within the society. For example, a leader of the Lumpwoods carried a crooked staff during meetings or parades. This was to show the people that he offered to give his life for the society and the people by leading the club into battle. The warrior societies were in constant competition with each other over feats such as stealing the most horses or who had taken the most scalps. [47]

Another factor, which contributed to Crow survival was how the different bands divided up, making it easier to provide for fewer people. At the same time the different bands each recognized an individual leader whom they trusted. For example, when the Crows moved onto the present reservation in the late-nineteenth century, the different bands followed their chiefs to the site of their choosing. Chief Pretty Eagle took his followers to a site near the base of the Bighorn Mountains, near present day Fort. Smith, Montana. Chief Plenty Coups selected a site sixty miles west of Pretty Eagle's location, and that was where his followers located themselves.[48]

Clan uncles also aided in the success of the Crows by guiding young relatives, and making sure that they did not go off and jeopardize their lives. The Crows were divided into seven different clans by the time of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. There

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[46] Lowie, *Crow Indians,* 172.
[47] Tim Smells, May 2000.

were the Big Lodges, Greasy Mouths, Piegans, Bad War Deeds, Sore Lips, Ties the Bundle, and Whistling Waters. The Crows were a matrilineal society, and as a result the children belonged to whichever clan the mother belonged to. The child in relation to its father's clan was a child of his clan. For example, if a boy's mother was a Big Lodge, and his father was a Greasy Mouth, then the child identified himself to the people by saying, "I am a Big Lodge, and a child of the Greasy Mouths." All Big Lodges were considered his siblings, and members could not inter-marry. Since he was a child of his father's clan that meant that he was also part of that clan and could not marry any of them. This system insured that none of the people of the tribe would intermarry with their clansmen or clanswomen.[49] All these factors combined to give stability to the Crow people, ultimately contributing to their survival.

The Crows gradually adopted a way of life filled with warfare. By the middle part of the nineteenth century, warfare was common for the Crows. By the time of Curley's birth children were raised to accept the concept that war was a fundamental way of life.

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[48] Arthur Big Man, 1992. Mr. Big Man informed me that an individual chief would select a site sacred to him and his followers. Plenty Coups had fasted in the mountains near the site he selected and received much good luck there.
[49] Tim Smells, May 2000.

CHAPTER II - FROM CRADLE TO MANHOOD

Curley (Shia-Shia) was born in 1859 on the Little Rosebud Creek, located in the Southeastern part of what is now Montana.[1] He was the only child of Strong Bear and Strikes by the Side of the Water.[2] Curley's parents were River Crows, which made Curley a member of the River Crow band. The Crows being a matrilineal society made Curley a part of his mother's clan, the Whistling Waters.[3] At the time of Curley's birth, the Crows still lived as hunter/gatherers, relying heavily on the buffalo. The Crows controlled a vast area of land inhabited by a variety of large game. Many of the surrounding tribes, such as the Sioux and Blackfeet, were constantly battling the Crows for control of these prime hunting grounds.

The aggressive nature of the surrounding tribes meant that Curley would be raised to become a warrior.[4] The training of warriors began shortly after their birth and required a great amount of time; only that would ensure the survival of the Crow nation.[5] Curley probably went through the different stages of such training, beginning in infancy and continuing until he was an adult. Unfortunately, little of Curley's infancy or his youth has been recorded. Other warriors, like Two-Leggings and Plenty-Coups, who lived about the same time as Curley, left behind extensive records of their childhoods. From

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[1] Plainfeather, *Greasy Grass,* 17-18; Kenneth Hammer, *Men With Custer: Biographies of the 7th Cavalry,* Ronald H. Nichols ed. (California: Ventana Graphics, 1995), 77.
[2] Plainfeather, *Greasy Grass,* 17-18.
[3] Dan Old Elk, interview, 2000.
[4] The Sioux were aggressive in ousting the Crows from their traditional homelands. Many people predicted that the Crows were destined to become extinct if the situation with the Sioux continued. As a result the Crows often prepared their males to defend the tribes. For Crow and Sioux relations see John S. Finnerty, *War-Path and Bivouac,* Milo Milton Quaife ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 22-23; Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan & his Army* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 121.
[5] For a detailed description of the training of Crow warriors see, Linderman, *Plenty Coups*, 1-32; Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him*, 33-41.

these accounts, we can assess Curley's early training, for he was probably raised in a similar fashion.

The Crow people were very superstitious, which was probably the case with Curley's parents. Shortly after Curley's birth, it is likely that he had his ears pierced by his mother. Traditionally, most Crow mothers pierced their child's ears and inserted good luck charms.[6] These women believed that the good luck charms would protect their children; especially in preparation for violent society they were about to enter. Grey Bull, a Crow warrior who was lived during this time explained the process of ear piercing to the anthropologist Robert H. Lowie. He said, "a few days after the child was born the mother would take a heated wooden awl and penetrate the child's ear lobe. After making a hole she would place a greased stick in the hole, leaving it for several days or until the hole was fully healed. Then an earring was inserted into the hole, and usually was some good luck charm that had been in the family for a long time."[7] Curley probably received his family's good luck charm to use as an infant.

Curley, like all infants received much attention from his mother, who was kept extremely busy. The children constantly remained close to their mothers due to the constant threat of attack by surrounding tribes. Crow mothers spent much of their time providing for their families' needs. They were either processing fresh kills or hard at work tanning hides and making clothing for their families.[8] The constant work required both hands, making it impossible for mothers to carry their infants. Most mothers relied

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[6] The Crows were considered one of the most superstitious tribes of the Plains. They possessed a great many medicine bundles, which served a wide range of purposes, such as protecting an infant. For Crow superstitions see, William Wildschut, and John C. Ewers, *Crow Indian Medicine Bundles* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1960), 1.

[7] Lowie, *Crow Indians*, 34.

[8] Frank B. Linderman, *Pretty Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 134.

heavily on cradleboards when working. A cradleboard was a hardened piece of flat rawhide or wood covered in buckskin.[9] The baby was wrapped in small robes then secured to the board by strips of deer hide. The baby could now be strapped to the mother's back or propped against a nearby tree or makeshift stand while the mother worked. The women, who were responsible of the majority of the work in the camps, probably valued the cradleboard.[10] Curley, like many Crow children likely spent much time in a cradleboard.

Traveling was another challenging task that mothers with infants had to endure. The women usually rode horses while trying to hold their babies, which became a task in itself. The cradleboard solved these problems because the women could secure their child to the board and tie it to the saddle, thus freeing their hands and enabling them to control their horse.[11] Curley probably spent much time in a cradleboard dangling from the side of his mother's horse.

Children were a vital part to Crow society, which is why Indian parents and grandparents openly expressed great love and fondness for their children. All Indians agreed that youngsters were never whipped or handled roughly. Crow children like Curley were never punished when they misbehaved or got into mischief, and most parents never physically hit their children.[12] Edwin Thomas Denig, regarding Crow children, wrote: "The men and women are troublesome enough in many things, but the greatest nuisance in creation is Crow children, boys from the ages of 9 to 14 years. These

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[9] Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 34.
[10] Francois Larocque stated that the women did all the work, and generally the men hunted and went to war. See, Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains*, 208-209.
[11] Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 34.
[12] Thomas E. Mails, *The Mystic Warriors of the Plains: The Culture, arts, crafts and religion of the Plains Indians* (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1995), 514.

are left to do just as they please. They torment their parents and everyone else, do all kinds of mischief without either correction or reprimand. In other nations these small fry are kept out of sight where men are, but the parents of this nation place them before themselves in every crowd or assembly, or in their own families. Thus they become intolerable, and a few years after ripen into the bold, forward, impudent young men before mentioned."[13] This clearly showed that Crow children enjoyed a great deal of love from their parents.

The most severe punishment infants endured probably came when parents poured water on their faces when they cried too much. The reason for this action, according to Grey Bull, was that a crying child could give away the location of families hiding from the enemy, which meant the difference between life and death. "Many of the children," explained Grey Bull, "quickly stopped their crying when the parents said, 'bring the water.'"[14] Curley probably experienced this type of punishment as an infant, since the threat of an attack was always on the mind of the Crows.

By the time Curley reached the age of four or five, his father and grandfather probably began taking more of an active role in his life. They may have taken Curley with them more often when they went to trade with the whites. It was about this age that Curley recalled the first time he ever met a white man. He remembered going into the white trader's cabin to trade buffalo calfskins for goods. He said, "I thought that was a great thing to do."[15]

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[13] Denig, *Of the Crow Nation,* 32-33.
[14] Lowie, *The Crow Indians, 35*
[15] Joseph K. Dixon, *Vanishing Race: The last Great Indian Council* (Glorieta, New Mexico: The Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1973), 142.

Many boys during this age began to go through the first stages of training to become a warrior. As Two-Leggings said, "There is not much to any boy's life. Even the gathering of wisdom is play. Many of our games had a purpose in those days."[16] Like the other boys, Curley probably learned many things through play. Plenty Coups explained: "All boys are alike, their hearts are young, and they let them sing."[17] Curley, much like all the other boys, was probably encouraged by his parents to play and explore.

One of the best times to do these things, according to Plenty Coups, was when the camp was on the move: "We moved camp very often, and it was great fun. As soon as the crier rode through the village telling the people to get ready to travel, I would find my young friends and we would catch up our horses as fast as the herders brought them in. Lodges would come down quickly, horses would be packed, travois loaded, and then away we would go to some new place we boys had never seen before. The long line of pack-horses and travois reaching farther than we could see, the dogs and bands of loose horses, all sweeping across the rolling plains or up a mountain trail to some mysterious destination, made our hearts sing with joy."[18] Curley probably experienced many moves like the one described by Plenty Coups.

Thomas LeForge also recalled that when the camp prepared to move, the young children were clearly excited about the event. He was also aware of the fact that the children learned much along the trail. LeForge recalled, "It was an occasion bringing me special enjoyment if I should kill a deer or an elk along the way. It is a recollection held in a favored corner of my memory, this event brought a swarm of little Indians to do the

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[16] Peter Nabakov, *Two Leggings: The Making of a Crow Warrior* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 19982), 5.
[17] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 7-9.
[18] *Ibid.*

butchering for me. Oh, How lively they were in this work! How rapidly and efficiently they could skin and cut up a deer!"[19]

Curley's mother likely played a significant role in raising him. This was in large part to the fact he, and most young males spent a considerable time with their mothers. One way that she probably influenced, him was how she would speak admiringly of young men who counted coups or supplied meat for the camp. Plenty Coups recalled one occasion when his mother and her friends sparked emotion into him. He recalled the conversation that occurred between them: "That young man on the white horse is Little-Wolf, son of Medicine-Women,' one would say admiringly. 'He is brave, and so handsome." "Yes, and he has already counted coup and may marry when he chooses,' another would boast. "'Think of it!' another mother would exclaim. 'He has seen but twenty snows! Ah-mmmmm!' "Perhaps she would lay her hand over her mouth, which is the sign for astonishment," explained Plenty Coups. He continued: "This talking between our mothers, firing us with determination to distinguish ourselves, made us wish we were men. It was always going on-this talking among our elders, both men and women – and we were ever listening. On the march, in the village, everywhere, there was praise in our ears for skill and daring. Our mothers talked before us of the deeds of other women's sons, and warriors told stories of the bravery and fortitude of other warriors until a listening boy would gladly die to have his name spoken by the chiefs in council, or even by the women in their lodges."[20] Curley probably experienced a situation much like this while growing up.

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[19] LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 148-149.
[20] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 7-9.

Although warfare was common on the plains, Curley's people, the Crows remained friendly with a few nearby tribes, like the Nez Perces.[21] Curley and the river Crows often traveled across the mountain ranges of the Bighorns to trade with their friends. On one trip Chief Joseph, who later led the Nez Perces' flight from the army, adopted Curley as a relative. Apparently Chief Joseph's family had lost a family member before the arrival of the Crows. Curley looked very much like the lost relative and was adopted into the band, which was a common practice during those days. He eventually learned to fluently speak the language of the Nez Perces.[22]

Horses became a major part of Curley's youth, as was the case with all Crow boys. By the time he was four or five, like many children at this age, Curley was likely able to ride and control horses without much help from his parents. Francois Larocque observed that the Crows were experts in riding horses. He wrote, "Everybody rides, men, women, & children," he continued to say, "they are excellent riders, being trained to it from their infancy."[23] Training these boys to ride horses was important because they were very much a part of any warrior's life. Growing up in the horse culture required Curley to be able to ride and train horses as well as care for them. Between the age of eight and twelve, Curley was probably taking responsibility for his father's herd, which most boys did at this age.[24]

Most plains tribes introduced horses to the boys by giving them responsibility of the herd's daily care. A typical day for Curley probably included playing with his friends, as well as caring for his father's horses.. The first thing Curley probably did in

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[21]Denig, *Of the CrowNation, 25.*
[22] Plain Feather, *Greasy Grass,* 18.
[23] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade,* 213.
[24] Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*, 37.

the mornings was to take his father's herd to the river for water. After that, he would drive the herd out to pasture, usually a short distance from camp. He then returned to have breakfast with his family and afterwards to play with his friends. His responsibility to the horses continued throughout much of the day. About noon for example, before having lunch, he would have to go and water the horses and making sure they hadn't run off. If the herd did run off or became scattered, the rest of his day was spent rounding them up. If not, he would have lunch return and then probably to play with his friends. At the end of the day, he was responsible again for watering the horses, then returning them to a pen near his fathers lodge.[25] Given the amount of time he spent on the horses, Curley probably quickly learned not to forget to check on his father's herd.

By the time Curley and his friends were teenagers, they were given the responsibility of training their fathers' horse herds. In most cases men such as Curley's father may have owned at least ten horses.[26] Crow warriors always made sure that their horses had the best care. In most cases they would go to extreme lengths to make sure that they did not risk injury to their prize mounts. Francois Larocque observed: "They are very fond of their horses and take good care of them; as soon as a horse has a sore back he is not used until he is healed."[27] In some cases the warriors would cover their horses hooves in buffalo hide as protection against the rugged terrain of the plains.[28]

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[25] For a detailed description of the daily care of horses during this time see Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Culture,* 37-38; Denig, *Of the Crow Nation*, 25-26.

[26] Francois Larocque noted that a man who possessed less than ten horses was considered poor. Most Crows he stated owned anywhere from ten to forty horses. Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains,* 213.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Captain Bonneville and his men remarked at the care the Crows took in their horses, observing that they covered the horses hooves with buffalo hide. This was done, apparently to protect them from injuring themselves on the sharp rocks. See Washington Irving, *Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (New York: The Co-operative Publication, Inc., 1902), 49.

Curley, and most boys his age were exposed early to the extreme care given to horses, as they were a vital part of survival.

The training of these horses was usually entrusted to the younger teenage boys such as Curley.[29] As a result, a team effort by Curley and his friends was required. One of the common ways to break a young horse was to find a small pond or a deep part of a river. The untrained horse was led into the deep part of the water and surrounded by at least three boys on horseback. The owner of the horse usually rode behind a fourth person on horseback. They would make their way out to the surrounded horse and move in close. When they were close enough, the owner would jump from the fourth horse's back onto the back of the untrained horse and hold on for his life as the horse tried frantically to throw its rider. The other boys quickly boxed in the frightened horse and prevented it from leaving the water. The force of the water restricted the movement of the horse, at the same time tiring it out. They continued to keep the horse in the water until it stood completely still and appeared to be comfortable with a person on its back. Once this happened, the horse was led out of the water with the rider on its back, still surrounded by the other riders. It was usually ridden for a few hours and then it would be allowed to rest. The process was repeated for a few more days, or until the rider could easily slip onto the horse's back on dry ground without assistance. From there the horse was slowly introduced to different situations, such as riding through large groups of people. The training of the horse continued until the horse was accustomed to life in an

[29] Gerald Reed stated that most of the initial training was done by young teens. After the horses became accustomed to camp life, then the warriors took over the training. By the time a horse received training, most responded to leg commands. Reed, 2000.

Indian camp.[30] Eventually the horses would respond to leg cues from the rider, which freed the rider's hands.[31]

Most boys like Curley were introduced to a bow and arrow by the time they reached the age of six or seven. Brothers, fathers, or grandfathers were usually responsible for supplying their young relative with this weapon. Bows were made out of a hard wood, such as ash or cedar.[32] The maker of the bow took a piece of ash wood, usually in the spring, which measured about four feet long with a six-inch diameter.[33] The wood was dried for about thirty days, and then carved into the shape of a bow. Once the proper shape was achieved, a piece of sinew was tied to each end, serving as the bowstring. The next step was to make arrows for the bow. Arrows were constructed by using willows for the shaft and metal for the arrowhead. A willow stick, usually about three feet long, was cut and peeled for the shaft. In most cases a dozen or more arrows were made for the young boys.[34] The willow sticks were dried over a fire and straightened by gently bending the stick in the direction away from the bend of the shaft. Once the shaft was straight, a notch was cut the end in which a metal point was inserted. Sinew was then wrapped around the notch, securing the arrow point in place. On the other end of the shaft, feathers, usually turkey features, were attached. The feathers were secured to the shaft, once again using sinew. The feathers made the arrow fly straighter, ensuring a higher chance of hitting the target. The final stage in the process was to melt

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[30] Gerald Reed recalled that in the 1930's many of the Crows were still breaking their horses using these methods. Reed, 2000.
[31] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade,* 213.
[32] For an in-depth account and description of the manufacturing of a Plains Bow and Arrow see Joseph Marshall III, *Hunter Warrior of the Plains,* prod. and dir. Bill Grunkemeyer, 47 min., Grunko Films, 1993, videocassette.
[33] The usual length of a bow for an adult was about six feet in height. Since young boys reach was short, a shorter piece of wood was required. *Ibid.*
[34] The best account of the Crow way to use of a bow and arrow, see Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 13-18.

the hooves of a buffalo for glue, which was applied generously to the arrowhead and feathers to secure them in place. The making of a bow and arrow usually took between one and two months to complete. The finished product now became a tool, which gave young boys such as Curley a chance to survive in the harsh environment around them.

Learning how to use the new tool required much practice. The teachers generally showed their pupils the method that had always been used among the Crows. The Crow method was to grip the bow firmly with the left hand then deftly to place an arrow with the right hand, the index and second finger straddling the shaft, and with the third finger, to pull the bowstring. The thumb's end was against the arrow where it was notched into the string. Chief Plenty Coups explained that in order to use the bow and arrow correctly, "both hands and both arms have to work together at once. The left must push and the right must pull at the same time if an arrow is to go straight or far. The left hand, palm toward one, its fingers straddling the arrow, must know and keep the center of the bow-string without the eyes having to look."[35] Once the young boys like Curley were able to hold the bow and arrow correctly, they were taught the next step.

The next step was to teach the boys how to shoot for distance. On a daily basis their teachers would take them to an open field so they could try to gain distance in their shooting. Once their arms were strong enough to shoot a good distance they began practicing their accuracy. One of the most important things that Curley probably learned about his new tool was always to keep his arrows straight. A bow would ever be able to shoot an arrow, but control of the arrow depended on how straight the arrow was. Like most boys, Curley probably used a bone straightener, or more than likely his teeth to do the job. A common way to learn accuracy for Curley and his peers was to shoot at

moving targets. Plenty Coups explained that when he was a boy learning to shoot for accuracy, one method in particular proved very effective. In this method, the boys were lined up in a row and armed with bow and arrows. The teacher would take a hardened buffalo chip and roll it in front of the boys a short distance away. The boys were instructed to shoot at the target while it was on the move. They repeatedly practiced until all the boys were able to hit the target. The next step for these boys was to learn how to shoot fast. Again, rolling the buffalo chip and shooting at it repeatedly was an effective way to learn accuracy and speed. Once Curley was able to handle his bow and arrow, he probably began hunting small game, such as rabbits and squirrels.

Most boys, like Curley, were also introduced to using the bow in extreme conditions. Pretty Shield explained that many of the buffalo hunters, in extremely cold conditions had their secrets, which were likely passed to the young boys. She stated: "Yes, and the buffalo-runners rubbed their hands with snow and sand, so that their fingers would be nimble at handling the bow and arrows."[36] Eventually, most boys became excellent marksmen, and often were successful in the hunts. Their marksmanship was observed by Francois Larcoque who stated, "they are excellent marksman with the bow and arrow, but poor shots with the gun."[37] During his 1805 visit to the Crows, he also noted that ammunition for the guns was scarce, which contributed to the Crows being poor shots with the gun.[38]

Curley, like most boys, continued training for war through much of his adolescence. He often imitated warriors by counting coups on game animals and making

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[35] *Ibid,* 17.
[36] Linderman, *Pretty Shield*, 84.
[37] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade,* 215.
[38] *Ibid.*

the girls dance with animal hair (scalp imitations).[39] Many of the young boys like Curley would go down to the river bottoms to play war games. They would split into two groups and practice sneaking up on one another. Once they were close enough they would touch each other with willow sticks, imitating the counting of coups.[40]

Living in that time, Curley and his peers had to be in good physical condition. One of the common ways to condition themselves was by running for a long period of time. Many fathers and grandfathers told their young boys that if they could catch a butterfly and rub it over their hearts, they would capture its powers.[41] Many young boys (probably Curley as well) spent hours running after butterflies. In reality the boys were being conditioned, but did not know it and, more importantly, they were having fun while doing it.

By the time Curley was ten, many of the games he and the other boys played became increasingly serious. The accounts of Plenty Coups as a ten-year-old suggest that the boys of that age experienced these same games. He gives an excellent example of one such game they played at this age. He explained:

> "Sometimes when the camp was filled with drying meat, an uncle of some boy, or perhaps a grandfather, would walk through the village telling us secretly to meet at some place on the river band. The place he selected would be timbered and shady, and there would be mud near at hand. As soon as we got the message, we would slip into our fathers' lodges and steal out a wolf's skin. Then we would run to the appointed place to meet our teacher. We knew what was intended, but each time the adventure was new to us, and we were like shadows slipping away from the village to the camp on the riverbank. Our teacher had been a boy himself and knew just how we felt. When we were all met we seated ourselves to listen to what he had to tell us, and nobody who has not been a boy can know the thrills we had when our teacher stood up to speak to us as warriors. He did not mention *meat*. He called it *horses* and spoke in this fashion: 'Young men, there is an enemy village near us. Our Wolves [scouts] have seen it and counted many

[39] Lowie, *Indians of the Plains,* 218.
[40] Nabakov, *Two Leggings,* 5.
[41] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 10.

> fine horses tied near the lodges. To enter this village and cut a fine horse tied near the lodges. To enter this village and cut a fine horse is to count coup. See! I have here some nice coup-sticks.' He would hold up several peeled sticks to which were tied small breath-feathers of a war-eagle. Off would go our shirts and leggings. There was no talking, no laughing, but only carefully suppressed excitement while our teacher painted our bodies with the mud that was sure to be there. He made ears of it and set them on our heads, so that they were like the ears of wolves. When the mud dried a little, it became gray-looking and closely resembled a wolf's color. Down on our hands and knees, our teacher would cover our backs with the wolf skins we had stolen our of our fathers' lodges. Ho! Now we were a real party of Crow Wolves and anxious to be off. We scattered then, each boy feeling the thrill a grown warrior knows when he is going into battle. I have felt them both, and they are the same," explained the Plenty Coups. " 'Now,' our teacher said when we were all ready, 'be wolves! Go carefully. Beware of the old women. Bring back some good horses, and I will give you a feast.' The racks of drying meat stretched through the village, and in a little time I was near them, looking for a fine fat piece to carry away. But always a little farther along I thought I saw a fatter piece and, acting like a wolf, crept toward it, only to discover it was no better than the others. At last I said to myself, 'This will do.' Plenty Coups further explained that he had been discovered by the owner of the meat and scolded, returning to his teacher embarrassed.[42]

However, the value of the lesson was priceless as many boys, such as Plenty-Coups and Curley, played this game often, learning how to be wolves.

Life during this time was violent, and it is highly probable that Curley was exposed to the violence at a young age. Two-Leggings explained that death was a common occurrence when he was growing up, giving a vivid account of one event:

> "One day I was leaving to hunt birds and had just reached the edge of the tipis when I heard a man shouting. He was too far away to be understood but I would see him wildly waving his arms. Some men galloped past me, heading for him. My brother's horse was tied close by and I jumped on without saddle or blanket. I recognized those riding beside me: Black Earth, Plain Weasel, Stays Among The Birds, and Rolls Himself. Pulling up, we saw the body. The two men had been surrounded by a small group of Piegans. The hair was gone from one side of the dead man's head, but his friend had fought so hard the Piegans had left after stealing their horses. Stays Among The Birds said that the dead man had been brave and that we would take revenge. His friend pointed the direction the Piegans had fled. That body lying on the ground made me very angry."[43]

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[42] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 18-22.

Two-Leggings went on to explain that he and other Crow warriors tracked the Piegan party down and killed one, taking his scalp.[44] Scenes such as these were common among many members of the plains tribes, and they must have sparked anger within the warriors who wanted revenge.

In some instances the entire tribe was involved in fending off a foe. It is likely that Curley was in this situation more than once. Zenas Leonard, a fur trapper, described a battle between the Crows and the Blackfoot. The Crows had initially set out to hunt, but spotted a body of Blackfoot warriors in the area. The hunting party quickly attacked the Blackfoot war party who quickly ascended a hill and fortified their position. A messenger was sent to the main Crow camp to call for reinforcements. Leonard described the events once the tribe was informed of the situation: "When the express reached the Crow village every man, woman, and child able to point a gun or mount a horse repaired with all speed to the scene of action, who came up uttering the most wild and piercing yells I ever heard in my life. A great deal of contention at first took place among the principal men of the Crow tribes as to the manner of attacking their enemy, who appeared to look down upon them in defiance; notwithstanding the Crows dept up a continual yelling and firing of guns."[45] Eventually, the Crows overwhelmed the Blackfoot, killing all sixty-nine warriors. The involvement of the tribe in warfare was apparently a common occurrence, which no one could escape during these times.

Curley, by the time he was twelve or thirteen probably began noticing that his role in the tribe was changing. Young boys his age were now being called to a variety of

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[43] Nabokov, *Two Leggings,* 15.
[44] *Ibid*
[45] Zenas Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, Milo Milton Quaife, ed. (Chicago: The Lake Side Press, 1934), 239.

different tasks to show that they were ready to become warriors. For example, the Crows believed that eating the heart of a grizzly bear made them stronger. Plenty Coups recalled his first experience in this situation, explaining: "One morning we were called together by my grandfather. He had killed a grizzly bear the day before, and when we gathered near him I saw that he held the grizzly's heart in his hand. We all knew what was expected of us, since every crow warrior has eaten some of the heart of a grizzly bear, so that he truthfully can say, 'I have the heart of a grizzly!'"[46] Most plains tribes, including the Crows, believed that the grizzly was always in its right mind. They believed that it was always ready to fight and protect its home, whomever it was up against.[47]

Another task that young boys like Curley usually experienced was finishing off an injured buffalo. In most cases the young boys between the ages of ten and twelve were summoned whenever a buffalo had been injured and was near death. The boys were told to kill the animal, which in most cases was an adult animal. The animal usually was still able to stand and attack, which made the task very dangerous. Once the boys surrounded the animal, the bravest would be the first to face it and shoot an arrow into the thick hide. One by one the boys began to take aim and fire at the animal, often having to avoid its attacks. Once the animal fell to the ground, the bravest of the boys would jump on it and cut its throat. It was a violent death for the buffalo, but boys learned quickly that buffalo were dangerous animals and hunting them a serious matter. Many boys wanting to become warriors went through this ordeal, and it is likely that Curley had the same experience.

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[46] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 25.
[47] Edmund Little Light, interview, February 2000.

Now teens many boys were asked to accompany hunting parties, but only as helpers.[48] Their duties were not to participate in the hunt but rather to tend to the camp. When these young boys went along, they were responsible for feeding the hunters and tending to their horses. They were also entrusted with keeping a watchful lookout for any dangers that might be in the area, such as the hated Sioux. Once a hunt returned successfully to camp, there was much feasting. Lengthy stories were told about the events on the hunt. Many of the boys were careful not to do anything foolish and make themselves appear incompetent. Occasionally, the warriors called on the young helpers to finish off injured game, which was a real treat.[49] Eventually many of the boys like Curley earned a chance to prove their worthiness and with this they soon became part of the hunt, as warriors.

Hunting buffalo was probably one of the most dangerous aspects of being a warrior, aside from actual battles. The buffalo are swift and often travel in large numbers. The biggest problem facing Curley and other warriors was to avoid startling the herd into a stampede before the other hunters had moved into position. The different warrior societies usually made sure that this did not happen.[50]

By the time of Curley's birth the Crows were relying heavily upon horses for most of the hunting. Prior to the arrival of the horse, the common way to hunt the buffalo was to herd them toward a cliff and drive them off over it.[51] Once the animals were forced over the cliff, many were killed and the wounded were easily taken care of. Another method, and probably the most common, was to ride horseback and focus on the

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[48] Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 46-47.
[49] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 29-32.
[50] Wood and Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade,* 209-210.
[51] For an in depth account of the buffalo jump, see Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 41-44.

herd's stragglers. If a buffalo could not keep up with the herd, it usually meant that it was old or wounded. These animals (stragglers) made the easiest types of kill for the warriors.

Trust between the hunters was critical, especially when hunting buffalo. Many of the leaders of hunting parties asked certain people they trusted to go along on a hunt. If one of the hunters were injured or in trouble, it was more than likely that the others would quickly come to his aid. On one occasion Two-Leggings fell from his horse in the midst of a buffalo hunt. The horse quickly disappeared into the thick dust, leaving its rider behind. Curley realized what had happened and rode to the fallen hunter's aid. He told Two-Leggings where his horse was, but unfortunately Two-Leggings was unable to locate his horse, but he appreciated Curley's help.[52] One of the other hunters at the time gave Two Leggings a part of his kill. Trust between the warriors became a critical part of their life.

By the time Curley and most boys his age were teenagers, they became very aggressive about becoming warriors. One common act teens did was tried to sneak away and follow war parties going against the Sioux or Blackfeet. They were no longer content with sham battles played along the river bottoms. Two-Leggings recalls that as a teen he went against his brother's wishes by sneaking off to follow a war party. The war party, led by Shows-his-Wings, discovered the young boy and took him back. After he was returned to camp, the war party left, but Two-Leggings again followed Finally, Shows-his-Wings allowed gave in and allowed him to go along with the party, but only as a helper. He said, "I would rather die on a raid than sit and do nothing in camp."[53]

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[52]Nabakov, *Two Leggings,* 159.
[53] *Ibid,* 12-13.

Fortunately, he made a good impression and was asked to go on other war parties. The aggressive behavior of teens like Two-Leggings revealed how many got their start as a warrior. The Crows, although not outright, encouraged this type of action, often by not stopping it. Zenas Leonard observed that there was much competition among the males of the tribe trying to outdo each other.[54] Leonard also observed that the males who did not become warriors were left to do the work of women.[55] Curley and his peers probably knew this, and likely attempted to make a name for themselves rather than doing the work of a woman.

Once Curley and other boys his age became warriors, they did not need much motivation to go on the warpath. The camp crier would often ride through the camp encouraging the young men to fast and seek visions. Many warriors would travel to sacred sites where they would fast to receive guidance. Curley probably fasted many times in order to gain confidence as a warrior. There were several motivating factors that aided a warrior's decision to move against the enemy. The first and biggest motivation was the desire to become noted among his people.[56] Many young men like Curley remembered the days when their mothers spoke admiringly of other young men, and they, too, wanted that same type of recognition. Curley surely wanted the people of the tribe to point their fingers at him and say how brave he was, or repeat some of the great deeds he had accomplished. All boys wanted the feasts and celebrations to be in their honor.

Another reason many warriors went on the warpath was to become wealthy. Warriors often fought against other tribes with the sole purpose of taking their horses.

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[54] Leonard, *Narrative of Adventures of Zenas Leonard,* 232.
[55] *Ibid,* 233.

The Crows were considered the wealthiest of the plains tribes in owning horses.[57] Owning horses was considered a sign of wealth and many of the warriors, such as Curley, realized this. To be considered wealthy or prominent, Curley knew he had to capture horses from his enemies.

Revenge became one of the biggest motivations for warriors to go into battle. Plenty Coups recalled that many warriors often went seeking revenge after a family member was killed at the hands of their enemy. He remembered riding into battle to avenge his brother, who had been killed by the Sioux on the Powder River.[58] Avenging the death of a relative was one of the few acts that ended mourning for the Crows.[59]

The retrieval of horses taken by the enemy was another reason so many young men risked their lives. Horses were valuable and many of the Crow were considered wealthy because they possessed fine horses.[60] Neighboring tribes were aware of this fact and continually attempted to take these horses from the Crow. If they were successful in stealing Crow horses, the Crows usually retaliated soon after. On one occasion, a party of Piegan had taken horses from Two-Leggings' camp. He noted that once the theft had been realized, a revenge party was organized. He explained, "I put on my warm clothes and took my flintlock. Leaving before sunrise, we quickly found their tracks. We rode all day and all night, allowing our horses only enough rest to keep moving. Soon after daybreak we discovered a burned brush shelter. The Piegan must have thought the cold

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[56]Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 46.
[57] Ewers, *Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture,* 23.
[58] Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 33-34.
[59] For Crow revenge on an enemy see, Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard,* 243-252; Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 123-124; James Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth: As told to Thomas D. Bonner* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 162-169.
[60] Leonard, *Adventures of Zenas Leonard,* 243-252 .

weather would keep us at home."[61] The reaction of Two Leggings and the Crows was quite common, especially when horses were involved. Curley probably witnessed, or served a part of an experience like this, since cutting horses constantly occurred between tribes.[62]

By the time Curley enlisted as a scout for the Seventh Cavalry during the Little Bighorn campaign, he had been on four raids against the enemy Sioux.[63] Although not much is known about his particular experiences on the raids, most raids carried out by the Crows were quite similar. Curley was probably asked to join the raiding party by the Pipe Holder. A Pipe Holder was the leader of the party and usually hand picked the people he wanted to join in the raid. A Pipe Holder was a warrior who had been on many successful raids without experiencing much failure. Pipe Holders were selected because of their bravery and intellect. Leaders of the tribe wanted to ensure that Pipe Holders did not put the party in any unnecessary danger and risk the lives of the warriors.

Warriors who were selected to go on the raid were usually picked for several different reasons. Some were chosen because of their success in past raids, while others were selected because the Pipe Holder trusted their ability. Still other warriors were selected for their ability to serve as effective scouts for the party. Curley was surely selected to go on one of the parties as a scout.[64]

Once the warriors were selected they were invited to the camp of the Pipe Holder to smoke the pipe. After everyone had a chance to smoke, the Pipe Holder would tell of

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[61] Nabakov, *Two Leggings,* 31.
[62] The term cutting horses refers to stealing an enemies horses, cutting his herd, etc. Linderman, *Plenty Coups,* 19.
[63] Dan Old Elk, 2000
[64] When the army asked for experienced scouts to go with Custer and the Seventh Cavalry, Curley's name was mentioned by some of the other Crow scouts prior to the battle of the Little Bighorn. *Ibid.*

his vision to his group. Usually the Pipe Holder told of a dream of a successful raid and how the people celebrated in honor of the party he led. Afterwards, each man in the group was given a chance to tell of his visions, or in most cases of his feelings about the upcoming raid. Usually the man had good things to tell, but occasionally one might tell of a bad vision. If a member had a negative vision he was allowed to leave, so as not to bring bad luck to the group. If a member elected to leave, he was not viewed as a coward; rather he was praised for his mercy on the group.[65]

Preparing for the raid proves the next step for the warriors. They had to make sure that they had enough ammunition, either arrows or bullets. Wives quickly made extra moccasins for their husbands and packed as much food as they could carry. Depending upon what type of raid they were about to embark upon, each warrior selected his mounts accordingly. If they planned on cutting horses, the party usually walked to their destination and returned riding their newly acquired horses. If a party were going to take scalps, they rode one horse and led their best mount, saving it for more strenuous work. The two horses that each warrior selected from his herd was always the two best, he realized that tribes quickly pursued their attackers.

On the day the party was to leave, the medicine man would go through a ceremony ritual that was required by his medicine bundle.[66] Often, the Pipe Holder would sing four songs and offer the pipe to each man, giving him one last chance to leave the party. Once each man accepted the pipe, the party would leave. Parties would be gone for weeks, or even months at a time. Upon returning to camp, the party would stop

[65] According to Joseph Smells, many warriors voluntarily excused himself from the party because of a bad vision, or feeling they had. They placed much trust in their visions, and often made decisions accordingly to these visions. Joseph Smells, interview, 1998.

a short distance from the main camp and dress in their best clothing, painting themselves in honor of their accomplishments. When each member was ready, the party announced its return by riding into camp yelling and firing off their weapons. If they had taken scalps, the scalps would be displayed, usually from the ends of their weapons. If they were successful in taking horses, they would run the horses through the camp for everyone to see. The families of the successful war party would quickly come out and welcome their men home. Afterwards, a big feast was planned in honor of their safe return and everybody was invited to attend. Unfortunately, some members of the raid might have been killed. The family of the dead warrior quickly excused Curley and the Crows to mourn for their slain relative.

By the mid 1860's the Crows were constantly at war with the surrounding tribes. It seemed that a raiding party was always being organized, either for revenge or for counting coup. They were also aware that whites were moving into their area seeking both land and gold. They realized that the Sioux were becoming increasingly present in Crow hunting grounds, fighting and killing many of their warriors. They understood that they needed help to fight their enemies, and thus the Crow were quick to give aid to the U.S. Army when they asked for scouts to help fight against the Sioux.

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[66] Individual bundles required different ceremonies. For example, Two-Leggings sang a song that was required for his medicine bundle right before taking horses, Nabakov, *Two Leggings,* 106.

CHAPTER III – CURLEY'S ROAD TO THE LITTLE BIGHORN

Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, the Sioux have been viewed as the prototype of Plains Indians, in some cases the prototype for all American Indians.[1] Their image came to national attention in large part because of their resistance to American encroachment, their refusal to accept reservations, and their reluctance to abandon their old way of life.[2] Sioux leaders such as Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse represented the Indians' fight for survival. Under their command, the Sioux won many battles against the United States Army, including the great victory over Custer and the Seventh Cavalry at the Little Bighorn in 1876. The Battle of the Little Bighorn became the fight that the Sioux won, but was also the beginning of the end for the Plains Indian.

Curley and his Crow people were also involved in a similar struggle for survival. Their struggle was not against the whites at first, but primarily against the Sioux.[3] The Crows, however, have never been viewed as a people fighting for their survival, but instead have been labeled as "sellouts" because their role as scouts during the Indian Wars. This negative image haunted Curley and his people for years, especially as it concerned their involvement in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Many failed to realize the longstanding conflict between the two tribes.

The Crows struggle for survival began from the moment the Sioux arrived on the plains. Many battles and skirmishes occurred between the two nations, in which the Sioux greatly outnumbered the Crow. In some cases, the Sioux allied

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[1] Kehoe, *North American Indians,* 302-303.

[2] For an in-depth account of the Sioux Wars see John S. Gray, *Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876* (Fort Collins, CO: Old Army Press, 1976; George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A history of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956); James C. Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

with other tribes, such as the Blackfeet and Cheyenne, in an attempt to displace or wipe out the Crows.[4] Fortunately for Curley and the Crow, they were able to survive the onslaught of the Sioux. In order to understand the situation between these traditional enemies, an overview of their relationship must be presented. Then, Curley's role as a U. S. Army Scout can be better understood.

THE SIOUX INVASION

The Teton Sioux are made up of seven different bands, which include the Sans Arc, Two Kettles, Miniconjou, Ogallala, Blackfoot, Hunkpapa and the Brule. In the seventeenth century, the various Sioux bands occupied most of Minnesota; their lands lay between the Cheyenne to the south and the Ojibwa (Chippewa) in Wisconsin.[5] Although the Sioux were more powerful than their chief enemies the Chippewa, they were no match for their foes' newly acquired metal weapons, especially the firearms.[6] These new tools were obtained by the Chippewa from French, and British trappers and traders.[7]

Once the Chippewas held the advantage, they began an unrelenting assault on their foe. Scores of Sioux warriors were being killed, and many more knew that their medicine was no match for the fire stick. At the same time the lure of buffalo on the plains aided the decision of the Sioux to migrate west. They eventually made their way into what is now the Black Hills.[8] While on the move to the Black Hills, the Sioux made short work of the Arickara Indians, who had control of the Missouri River. Once in the Black Hills, the Sioux quickly displaced the Crow and Kiowa

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[3] White, "The Winning of the West," 327, 333.
[4] *Ibid,* 333-334.
[5] Kehoe, *North American Indians,* 302-303.
[6] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk,* 3.
[7] White, "The Winning of the West, " 322.
[8] *Ibid,* 326.

nations who controlled that beautiful country. They also became a threat to other surrounding tribes, in large part because of their great numbers.[9]

In the early part of the nineteenth century, the warfare between the Sioux and the Crow escalated, especially when white fur traders increasingly began to move into the area, bringing with them European trade items. They brought such items as metal pots and pans, knives, metal for the points of the arrows, and most importantly guns. These trade items became crucial to the lives of the plains Indians. Each tribe sought out the traders, especially those who sold guns.

The first recorded hostility between the Crow and Sioux Indians occurred in 1785-1786. Apparently, Bear's Ears, a Brule, and Broken-Leg-Duck, an Oglala had attempted to take horses from the Crows. The Crows discovered the pair, and killed them. This skirmish occurred in, or near, the Black Hills, which the Crows still controlled at the time. This began a war that lasted until the Sioux were subdued by the American army. This also marked the beginning of a strong Sioux presence in the northern plains.[10]

Francis Antoine Larocque, who visited the Crows in the early part of the nineteenth century, witnessed the Crow and Sioux engaged in warfare, but usually on a small scale. From that time forward, the conflicts began increasing steadily as the Sioux became a permanent neighbor.[11] The Crows were able to repel the relatively few Sioux war parties, but by the 1830's, the two tribes began fighting on another level. The battles began to include entire bands, which made the stakes higher.[12]

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[9] Hyde, *Red Clouds Folk,* 18-20, 24; White, "The Winning of the West," 327.
[10] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk,* 24.
[11] White shows the increasing conflict between the Crows and the Sioux in the nineteenth century. White, "The Winning of the West," 319-343.
[12] Zenas Leonard, a fur trapper and trader witnessed a fight involving the entire tribe. He wrote in his journal, "When the express reached the crow village every man, woman, and child able to point a gun

In one event in 1834, the Sioux surprised Sore Belly and his band. According to accounts of tribal elders, Sore Belly and his people were on the edge of defeat. His entire band was under attack and he must have realized that if the Sioux were victorious. They would probably murder many of his people, including the women and children. Apparently wearing an eagle feather war bonnet whose tail floated six feet behind him, Sore Belly rode forward to lead a last-minute rout of the Sioux.[13] As a result, the band was saved, and the Crows continued to dominate the area.

Six years later, father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, a Belgian priest, reported that the Crows continued to rule the Yellowstone. "The Crows are considered the most indefatigable marauders of the plains," he wrote in his journal. "Their country seems to stretch from the Black Hills to the Rocky Mountains, embracing the Wind River Mountains and all the plains and valleys watered by that stream, as well as by the Yellowstone and Powder rivers. I rode with this camp for two days, they had plenty of everything."[14]

By the 1840's, the tide of good fortune had begun to turn against the Crows. A steady stream of white settlers started moving west in search of new lands and, especially, gold. Feeling the pressures of the westward migration by the whites the Sioux moved further west into Crow country. Instead of retreating, the Crows resisted the Sioux encroachments. The Crows, not intimidated by the more numerous Sioux, accepted the new way of life filled with warfare. The main reason for their resistance can be attributed to the fact that the Crows had a distinctive and strong

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or mount a horse repaired with all speed to the scene of action, who came up uttering the most wild and piercing yells I ever heard in my life." Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard,* 239.

[13] Joseph Smells, interview, 1998.

"national" identity, which Zenas Leonard, a fur trapper observed. He believed that the Crows were a proud people.[15] Margaret Carrington, wife of an Army officer also noted that the Crows were a proud people, and many of their enemies knew it. Mrs. Carrington observed a meeting between her husband Col. Carrington, and some Cheyenne Chiefs. The Chiefs were asked why the Sioux and Cheyenne claim the land which belongs to the Crows. Their response was, "The Sioux helped us. We stole the hunting-grounds of the Crows because they were the best. The white man is along the great waters, and we wanted more room. We fight the Crows, because they will not take half and give us peace with the other half."[16]

During the 1850's, fur trappers near Fort Laramie and Fort Union reported a stronger Sioux presence in the area. War between the Sioux and the surrounding tribes, including the Crow, seemed at an all-time high. It was evident that many fur trappers were encouraging the Sioux to push the Crows out of the areas of the Platte and the Missouri. In 1859, the army reported that the Crows "thus far have been able to maintain their independence and defend their homelands." However, it was also reported that the Crows expressed concern about the constant pressure of Sioux attacks. A band leader of the Mountain Crow named Red Bear, stated to army officials that, "the Sioux were always making war on us."[17]

At one point during this time, it appeared that peace between the tribes might actually be a reality. Congress authorized a delegation to approach the plains tribes in order to conduct a peace treaty. The treaty was also intended to create boundaries

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[14] Pierre-Jean DeSmet, S. J., *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, S. J.* Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson, eds. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), Vol. 1, 238.

[15] Zenas Leonard, *Adventures of Zenas Leonard,* 250-252.

[16] Margeret I. Carrington, *Absaraka: Home of the Crows* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1950), 7-8.

between the warring tribes, but more importantly to create a safe route for white emigrants through Indian lands. At the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, the Crows and their longtime enemies, the Sioux, agreed to live in peace. However, the peace was short lived. Once the council was over, war resumed between the two nations.[18]

The conflict between the Sioux and the Crows carried on into the 1860's, but the most challenging times were yet to occur. In1860, or 1861, a major battle occurred between the Crow and the Sioux. This battle came know to be as, "The battle of Pryor Creek," or what the Crows call, "Where the entire Camp was surrounded."[19] This clash took place about twenty miles south of present-day Billings, Montana. According to Joe Medicine Crow, the Sioux leaders made plans for the battle by telling the warriors, "Let us kill the men but save the boys to be trained as Lakota warriors. This we must do to become strong and able to stop the white man in his relentless pursuit of us." At the time of the battle Curley was about one or two years of age, and he might have been one of the boys taken had the Sioux been successful. If that were the case, Curley might have been fighting against Custer, rather than scouting for him. Fortunately the Crows were able to resist the Sioux attacks, but they paid heavily in the loss of warriors. [20]

During the 1860's, the Crows were faced with yet another challenge, a challenge that eventually ended a way of life. The discovery of gold brought a tremendous surge of whites into the West in 1860. As a result the Sioux moved deeper into Crow country. That year, gold seekers found gold in Nez Perce country

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[17] Fredrick Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America 1805-1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 74.
[18] Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem,* 6-7; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk,* 64-65.
[19] Herman J. Viola. *Little Bighorn Remembered: The untold Indian story of Custer's Last Stand* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 107.
[20] *Ibid.*

on the Clear Water River. Other rivers, such as the Salmon, the Boise, and the tributaries of the Snake River heading in Oregon, also produced gold. Prospectors soon began to branch out following other rivers in hopes of making major strikes. By 1861, gold seekers turned up gold on the headwaters of the Missouri River and this resulted in thousands of people flooding into Montana.[21] The white population of Montana quickly increased, resulting in many Indian-white encounters, especially with the Sioux, who became increasingly hostile.[22]

About this time, a man by the name of John Bozeman discovered a route that blazed a trial through what the Sioux claimed as their hunting grounds. In reality, this trail actually crossed the land owned by Curley and the Crow people, as specified under the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851.[23] The trial, which came to be known as the Bozeman Trail, became popular with many of the prospectors headed to the gold fields in western Montana. The Army, in order to protect prospectors from Indian attacks, erected three forts.[24] Colonel Henry B. Carrington was in charge of erecting the forts in the midst of lands claimed by the Sioux. They were Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith.[25] As a result, the Sioux focused their time and attention on closing the forts.

At the height of the Bozeman Trail conflict, Red Cloud, although not a chief, began to rise to prominence among his people. The main reason for his rise was due to his skills as a political leader, and, more importantly, his opposition to the Bozeman Trail. He was in favor of fighting the whites, and keeping them off their

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[21] Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846 – 1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 71-72.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] A description of the Crow lands as a result of the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty can be found in Norman B. Plummer, *Crow Indians: The Crow Tribe of Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), 26.

newly claimed hunting grounds.[26] Red Cloud knew that in order to stop the whites from entering Sioux hunting grounds, the three forts along the Bozeman Trail had to be removed. Thus, he began planning his strategy to close down the forts. From 1866 until 1868, Red Cloud and his Sioux Warriors harassed and attacked countless whites along the trail. They bottled up the soldiers in their forts and attacked anyone that tried to leave. Three major battles occurred between the Sioux and the army and this forced the closing of the forts and the discontinued use of the trail.[27] The most significant of the fights occurred at Fort Phil Kearney in northeastern Wyoming in December of 1866, known as the Fetterman Massacre. The victory over Captain William J. Fetterman and his men was the biggest victory for Red Cloud and his warriors during this conflict. The loss was embarrassing for the army, but for the Sioux it was a major morale booster.[28]

The seemingly victorious Sioux signed the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty, which officially closed the Bozeman trail. By signing the treaty, Red Cloud and the Sioux promised to live on reservations located in the present state of South Dakota. In return, the government promised that non-Indians could not enter Sioux lands unless given permission to do so by the Sioux.[29] The problem with the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty lay with the fact that there were several different bands of Sioux who recognized different leaders. Other bands, such as Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa, did not sign the treaty and they were not about to abide by it. Another problem with the

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[24] Utley, *Indian Frontier,* 100-101.
[25] Edgar I. Stewart, *Custer's Luck* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 36-39.
[26] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk,* 139-142.
[27] Don Rickey Jr., *Forty Miles a day on Beans and Hay* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 7.
[28] For an indepth account of the Fetterman fight see, Dee Brown, *Fort Phil Kearney: An American Saga* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962); Roy E. Appleman, ed. *Great Western Indian Fights* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 117-131; John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memoirs* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 170-173.

treaty was the Sioux succeeded in forcing the federal government to recognize the southeastern portions of Montana and northeastern part of Wyoming as "unceeded lands." As a result, the Sioux were able to hunt and roam freely in Crow country without government interference.[30]

While at the signing of the treaty, it was evident that Red Cloud and his people had no intention of being peaceful with the Crows. They requested lead and powder from the government officials, in order to fight the Crows.[31] For Curley and the Crow people, this meant that the Sioux were advancing dangerously close to their homelands.

This was evident as the situation between the Sioux, the whites, and the Crow remained unchanged from1868 through 1874. The Sioux continued to attack and harass whites, while sending raiding parties against Curley's people. In 1874, the situation became more violent after gold was discovered in the Black Hills. The army had authorized Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer to lead an expedition into the Black Hills. The purpose of the expedition was to find out if gold was present in the sacred mountains claimed by the Sioux. Once gold was discovered, thousands of miners moved into the Black Hills, resulting in an eruption of violence.[32] The Sioux retaliated by attacking white prospectors, while continuing to fight the surrounding tribes such as the Crows.

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[29] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk,* 162.
[30] Paul A. Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and his Army* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984),283; Plummer, *Crow Indians,* 85.
[31] Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem,* 80-81.
[32] Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and his Army,* 291-301; Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem, 171-175;* Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk,* 217-230.

The initial reaction of the government was to stop white prospectors from entering the Black Hills, which the government promised to do.[33] However, once the situation became uncontrollable, the government's policy was to not prevent whites from entering the Black Hills.[34] At first they attempted to resolve the issue by offering to buy the Black Hills, but when the Sioux refused to sell the government closed the unceeded territory to the Sioux. The government then declared that the Sioux had broken the treaty of 1868, by raiding along the borders of the unceded territory and political leaders pondered what course of action to take.[35] The matter was then turned over to the war department. The two senior officers, Generals William T. Sherman and Philip H. Sheridan, devised a plan that would place the Sioux back on their reservations and end the turmoil on the plains. An ultimatum was sent to all the non-reservation Sioux.[36] It declared that all Indians must return to their designated reservations or the army would drive them in by force.[37]

Once the deadline passed, and the Sioux did not respond, the army put their plan into motion. General Sheridan's plan was to send three military columns after the Sioux. They would surround the Indians and force them to return to their reservations. Sheridan's objective was to hit the Sioux when they were in their winter camps, which made them less likely to escape. However, because of bad weather the campaign did not begin until later in the spring. The strategy required that one column originate from the Montana territory and was to be headed by Colonel John Gibbon. General George Crook was to command the Wyoming column, which

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[33] Olsen, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem,* 172.
[34] Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and his Army,* 299; John S. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 123-124.
[35] Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign,* 123-124.
[36] These non-reservation Sioux were ones that did not agree to live on the reservations, and were led by leaders such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk,* 249-250.

would leave Fort Phil Kearney, while General Alfred Terry headed the Dakota Column out of Fort Abraham Lincoln.[38] Custer and the Seventh Cavalry were under General Terry. Sherman and Sheridan were confident that any one of the three columns alone could handle any number of Sioux warriors they encountered. Both generals were also aware that in order to be successful, they had to have a winter campaign. Their plan was to catch the Indians in their winter camps, when food supplies were low and the horses at their weakest. They felt that the Indians would be less willing to fight in this situation.[39]

The main problem facing the army, however, was that they had little knowledge about the land they were entering. They decided that using Indian scouts to guide them through the area was the best solution to their problem. Under the 1866 act to increase the army, the president had authorized the enlistment of up to a thousand Indian Scouts. They were to receive cavalry pay, which was thirteen dollars a month, and be discharged whenever they fulfilled their duties as scouts.[40] The scout's primary duty was to find the camps of the Sioux and Cheyenne. They were not expected to participate in the actual fighting.[41] Along with the regular pay, the Scouts' rewards were twofold; a chance to obtain the booty from the enemy, and a chance to fight against a common foe. This was especially true for Curley and the Crows, who now had a chance to ally themselves with the soldiers to whip the Sioux. The Crows long animosity toward the Sioux made them ideal candidates for the job.

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[37] *Ibid;* Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and his Army,* 301; Stewart, *Custer's Luck,* 76-77.
[38] Hutton, *Phil Sheridan, 302-303;* Graham, *The Story of the Little Big Horn,* 6.
[39] Hutton, *Phil Sheridan,* 301.
[40] Thomas W. Dunlay, *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the United States Army, 1860-90* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 44.
[41] *Ibid.*

In the spring of 1876, the U.S. Army approached the Crows, wanting to enlist warriors to serve as scouts. Colonel Gibbon had sent word to the Crows, requesting a meeting.[42] The Crow warriors and their leaders were aware of the situation with the Sioux. Colonel Gibbon and his men had been patrolling the area near the Crow agency, which was obvious to the Crows. They patrolled the north side of the Yellowstone River, trying to prevent the Sioux from going any further north.[43] It became evident to Curley and his people that the Sioux were encroaching onto their lands, and that they would continue to do so until they were stopped.

On the morning of April 9th, Gibbon, along with his officers, awaited the arrival of the Crow Chiefs. A short while later Dexter Clapp, agent for the Crows, led the Crow Chiefs into the room where Gibbon and his men were waiting.[44] Curley, and some of the other young warriors, probably had already been aware of the meeting.

Gibbon was first to address the Crow Chiefs via the French Canadian interpreter Pierre Shane. He stated, "I have come down here to make war on the Sioux. The Sioux are your enemy and ours. For a long while, they have been killing white man and killing Crows. I am going to punish the Sioux for making war upon the white man. If the Crows want to make war upon the Sioux, now is their time. If they want to drive them from their country, and prevent them from sending war

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[42] LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 205-208.

[43] Thomas LeForge observed that Gibbon was patrolling the north side of the Yellowstone, in an attempt to keep the Sioux from going north. See LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 205-208. Lieutenant Bradley wrote in his journal that the Crow village which was in the Bighorn valley was gone. He believed that the disappearnce of the camp indicated that the Sioux were heading in that direction, which indicates that he Crows were aware of a large Sioux presence. See James H. Bradley, *The March of the Montana Column: A Prelude to the Custer Disaster* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961),142.

[44] For an indepth account of the meeting between the army and the Crows see James H. Bradley, *The March of the Montana Column*, 39-48; James Willirt, *To the Edge of Darkness: A chronicle of the*

parties into their country, to murder their men, now is their time. If they want to get revenge for the Crows that have fallen, to get revenge for the killing of such men as the gallant soldier, Long Horse, now is their time."

Gibbon paused to allow Shane to translate. Then he continued, "White men and red men make war in a different way. The white man goes through the country with his head down, and sees nothing. The red man keeps his eyes open, and can see better than a white man. Now, I want some young warriors of the Crow tribe to go with me, who will use their eyes, and tell me what they see. I don't want men who will be willing to ride along with my men, and stay with the wagons. I have plenty of those. I want young, active, brave men, who will find out where the Sioux are, so that I can go after them. They will be soldiers of the Government, get soldier's pay, and soldier's food, and, when I come back, will come back with me, and join their tribe."[45]

After explaining his purpose to the chiefs, Gibbon sat down to await their reply. However, after a short while, when the chiefs did not respond, he became increasingly annoyed. He asked them for a response. An older chief named Old Crow responded, saying, "You have said what you had to say; don't be too fast! We are studying within ourselves and will talk after awhile."[46]

While Gibbon sat waiting, he began to wonder about the interpreter's ability to translate. As he later recalled, "They listened in silence to the interpreter as he translated, or appeared to translate what I said. For when he came to translate their answers to me he strung his English words together in such a fearfully incongruous

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1876 Indian War, General Gibbon's Montana Column and the Reno Scout March (El Segundo, California: Upton and Sons Publishers, 1998), 41.

[45] *Ibid*

[46] Bradley, *March of the Montana Column,* 41.

way as made me tremble at the idea that my eloquent appeal to the chiefs had been murdered in the Crow tongue, as he was murdering the English in conveying to me their answer."[47]

The head chief of the Mountain Crow band, Sits-In-The-Middle-Of-The-Land[48], then requested that interpreter Pierre Shane not translate the Crows' meeting to the officers. Lieutenant Bradley, who witnessed the meeting, later wrote, "[Blackfoot] then spoke, for some time, in an animated manner, with impressive gestures, receiving frequent expressions of approval from his native audience. In air and fluency of speech, he appeared the orator. Having thus sounded the opinions of his brother chiefs, Blackfoot came forward, shook hands with the General, and gentlemen with him, returned to his place, gathered his robe about him, leaving one arm exposed and free, and, with easy dignity and grace, spoke."

He began by telling the soldiers of the situation that he and the other chiefs were in regarding Gibbon's request. He stated, "The white people want us to assist them. I do not know the way of the whites; my people do not know their ways. The land we tread belongs to us, and we want our children always to dwell in it. All other Indian tribes do evil to the whites; but I, and my people, hold fast to them, with love. We want our reservation to be large; we want to go on eating buffalo; and so we hold fast to the whites. I am telling the truth to the white chief." After allowing Shane to interpret his words, he continued, "our young men are before you; but they will not listen to what I say. If you want to them to go with you, I would like them to go. But, if I tell them to go with you, they will not obey." Blackfoot continued to speak,

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[47] *Ibid;* Thomas LeForge, who was also at the meeting however, contradicts the statements made by Gibbon. He believed that Pierre Chien[Shane], the interpreter for the meeting was very good. He stated that he was competent in his job as a translator. LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian,* 206.

mostly talking of his displeasure with the whites' broken promises regarding rations, but Gibbon interrupted saying, "I want to hear now from such men as want to get scalps and want to go to war?" However, according to White-Man-Runs-Him, the Crows by this time were wary of the promises made by the government.[49]

Dexter Clap, the Crows' agent, interjected saying to the Crows, "Some time ago, war widows appeared before the chiefs, naked and bleeding from wounds they had given themselves in their grief, and besought them for revenge. Some of the young men promised to revenge them, that they might paint themselves black and cease to mourn. Now is the time for them to get that revenge."[50] Again Gibbon stated, "I want to hear, now, from some of the fighting men, men such as Crazy Head, Spotted Horse, men that want to go to war."[51] At this point in the meeting a good number of the Crow Warriors had expressed their desire to attach themselves to the army.[52] The meeting continued throughout most of the day until finally, the Chiefs retired to their lodges to discuss the situation.[53]

The next day, April 10, 1876, at the tender age of 17, Curley decided to enlist. He was now in the 7th Infantry as a scout; and was one of the youngest of the group.[54] White Swan, who would later be wounded in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, also enlisted, probably in part to watch over Curley. Curley referred to White Swan as "Biike," which means "older brother" in the Crow tongue.[55] Whether White Swan

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[48] Sits-In-the-middle-of-the-Land is also known as Blackfoot. Arthur Big Man, Interview 1992.
[49] Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him*, 76.
[50] Bradley, *March of the Montana Column*, 43.
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian, 208.*
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] A copy of Curley's enlistment forms can be found in Curley Collection, Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Montana.
[55] Plain Feather, *Greasy Grass*, 18.

and Curley were blood brothers is not known. However, it is known that blood or no blood, a declaration of brotherhood proved just as strong a bond among the Crows.[56]

Armed with twenty-three Crow Scouts, and two Crow-related white scouts, Colonel John Gibbon and his men moved down the Yellowstone River toward General Alfred Terry's command, which was coming from Fort Abraham Lincoln.[57] Many of the Crow scouts, including Curley, were unaccustomed to army life. They complained bitterly to the elder scouts after their sleep was interrupted by the sounds of the bugle on their first morning out. The elder scouts confronted Gibbon, who quickly interceded on the Crows behalf. Thomas LeForge explained to Lt. Bradley about the circumstances with his new Crow scouts. "I tried to explain to Bradley that they [Crows] likely would do better and be better satisfied if left to follow to a great extent their own ways of scouting," he explained.[58] Eventually, Curley and the other scouts adapted to this new style of warfare.[59]

As Gibbon and his men moved down the Yellowstone River, Curley and the other scouts encountered the Sioux on several occasions, even losing their horses to them at one point. Despite this minor setback they continued performing their duties.[60] In June, Gibbon's command met up with General Terry's command near the mouth of Rosebud Creek. The Crow scouts were told that the Sioux trail was found heading up the Rosebud valley. Apparently, the Seventh Cavalry under Lt. Colonel

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[56] Joseph Smells, 1998.
[57] Squaw men referred to white men married to Indian women. Barney Bravo and Thomas LeForge were two whites who lived among the Crows and were married to Crow women. See Bradley, *March of the Montana Column,* 48-49.
[58] LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian,* 210; Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 84.
[59] Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 84.
[60] Bradley, *March of the Montana Columns,* 87.

Custer, who was called "Son-of-The-Morning-Star" by the Crows, was going to lead an expedition to track down the Sioux.[61]

Curley and five other Crows were informed that they would be going with Son-of-The-Morning-Star to run down the Sioux. The others would remain with Gibbon, and head back up the Yellowstone River. It was evident that Gibbon and Bradley were unhappy about parting with any of their scouts, especially six of their best.[62] Bradley noted in his journal, "He [Custer] is provided with Indians scouts, but from the superior knowledge possessed by the Crows of the country he is to traverse, it was decided to furnish him with a part of ours, and I was directed to make a detail for that purpose. I selected my six best men, and they joined him at the mouth of the rosebud. Our guide, Mitch Bouyer[sic], accompanies him."[63] The six selected to lead the Seventh Cavalry were White-Man-Runs-Him, Hairy Moccasin, White Swan, Goes Ahead, Curley, and Half-Yellow-Face who was the Pipe carrier for the Crow Scouts.[64] Curley now found himself under a different leader named Lt. Charles A. Varnum, who would be in charge of Curley as he headed toward the Little Bighorn.[65] Curley and the other Crow scouts, however, soon found themselves answering directly to him.[66]

The land they were about to enter had been traditional Crow hunting grounds, which were being invaded by the Sioux.[67] It appeared that Custer understood the situation that Curley and his people were in. He also understood the need for Indian

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[61] Stewart, *Custer's Luck,* 240-241; Graham, *The Story of the Little Bighorn,* 12-13.
[62] Stewart, *Custer's Luck,* 245-246.
[63] Bradley, *March of Montana,* 143.
[64] Dixon, *The Vanishing Race*, 142.
[65] Charles A. Varnum, *Custer's Chief of Scouts: The Reminiscences of Charles A. Varnum,* John M. Carroll ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 84-85.
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] The land between the Black Hills and the Bighorn was wrested away from the Crows by the Sioux by the turn of the nineteenth century. See White, "The Winning of the West," 327.

auxiliaries when fighting hostile tribes, such as the Sioux. Custer was aware of the fact that many of these scouts were usually from tribes that were smaller in numbers, compared to their enemies. He stated, "To these smaller tribes it was a welcome opportunity to be permitted to ally themselves to the forces of the Government and endeavor to obtain that satisfaction which, acting alone, they were powerless to secure."[68]

This was the first time that Custer had any contact with the Crows, and was very impressed with them. After the meeting, he wrote to his wife, Libby, saying, "I now have some Crow scouts with me, as they are familiar with the country. They are magnificent looking men, so much handsomer and more Indian-like than any we have ever seen, and so jolly and sportive; nothing of the gloomy, silent Redman about them. They have formally given themselves to me, after their usual talk. In their speech, they said they had heard that I never abandoned a trail, that when my food gave out, I ate mule. That was the kind of man they wanted to fight under; they were willing to eat mule too!"

On June 22, Curley and the Crow scouts led Custer and the 7th Cavalry up the Rosebud Valley. The competent half-blood, Mitch Boyer, was also sent along with the Seventh to serve as a scout and interpreter.[69] The Scouts moved cautiously ahead of the main column, looking for any indication of hostile forces. Curley and his companions soon found sufficient evidence in the valley indicating a Sioux presence. Old campsites were found, but more importantly, a site was discovered where the

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[68] George A. Custer, *My Life on the Plains,* Milo Milton Quaife ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 271.
[69] Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign, 204.*

Sioux had recently conducted a Sundance.[70] Curley, and his fellow scouts realized that the Sioux were preparing for a battle.[71]

However, it wasn't until the evening of the 24th that Curley and his companions found a clear indication of the Sioux village and its whereabouts. Apparently the Sioux trail which they had been following up the Rosebud now left the valley, heading west. The Crow scouts reported to Custer that the trail crossed the divide, and disappeared somewhere in the Little Bighorn Valley.[72] When this news was reported to Custer, he quickly decided to send the Curley and the Crow scouts to find the exact location of the camp. He told them, "Tonight you shall go without sleep. You are to go ahead. Your are to try to locate the Sioux camp. You are to do your best to find this camp. Travel all night. When day comes, if you have not found the Sioux camp, keep on going until noon. If your search is useless by this time, you are to come back to camp."[73] However, Curley and his companions quickly interjected, informing Custer of a high point in the Wolf Mountains, which many Crow War parties used to view the Little Bighorn Valley.[74] Apparently, from this point the whole valley could be observed without being detected. Custer now changed his mind, ordering the Crows to go to the point, and he and the Seventh would follow later. Lt. Varnum, Charlie Reynolds, Mitch Boyer and six Arickara scouts also went along.[75] Riding through the darkness, Curley and the other scouts made their way up Davis Creek, finally reaching the point now called the Crows Nest at about 2 o'clock in the morning of the 25th. As the sun climbed higher on the

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[70] Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 96-97.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] Varnum, *Custer's Chief of Scouts,* 86-87.
[73] Harcey and Croone, *White-Man-Runs-Him,* 104.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] Varnum, *Custer's Chief of Scouts,* 86-87.

morning of the 25th, the Curley and the Crow scouts spotted smoke rising from the Sioux and Cheyenne campfires. Beyond the smoke they spied a large dark spot, obviously the pony herd. Varnum, who could not see the herd, was told by one of the Crow scouts to look for "worms on the grass."[76]

At 5 o'clock that morning, a message was sent to Custer informing him about the Crows discovery. Shortly after the message was sent, the Crows spotted two Sioux Warriors riding in the direction of the soldiers. Curley and the other scouts knew that if the two warriors spotted the soldiers, they might run and tell the village. They decided to go down and kill the two, but fortunately, they began riding off in a different direction. Shortly thereafter, Custer made his way to the top of the hill, but by then the morning haze had covered the valley, making it difficult for Custer to see for himself, what the Crows had reported.[77] Custer also learned from the Crows that the Sioux warriors had spotted his men.[78]

Custer and Varnum's detachment of scouts then returned to the main camp. Custer now decided to attack the village, fearful that he Sioux would scatter in all directions if they knew the soldiers were close by.[79] Custer, now convinced that his camp had been spotted gave the orders to move down toward the village, with the intention of attacking it.[80]

After the Seventh Cavalry had been divided up, Curley and the Crow scouts took the lead down Ash Creek (Reno Creek). They moved cautiously as they started down Ash Creek (Reno Creek). A few hours later they came across a lone tipi located near the previous campsite of the Sioux and Cheyenne, five miles east of the

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[76] *Ibid,* 87.
[77] Varnum, *Custer's Chief of Scouts,* 86-88.
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Gray, *Custer's Last Campaing,* 237-238.

Little Bighorn River. They remained at a distance, watching what appeared to be family members gathered by the tipi mourning the death of a relative.[81] When the soldiers approached, the Sioux family noticed the approach of the soldiers and ran down the valley to the main camp. Major Marcus Reno and his detachment were ordered to give chase, while Curley and the other scouts remained with Custer. They followed Reno's trail for a short while, then veered off to the north. It was from this point that Curley's role in the battle becomes controversial. Afterwards, numerous people had many interviews with Curley. Walter Camp, who later befriended Curley, probably discovered the most accurate story. Curley's movements, as told to Walter M. Camp by Curley, are as follows:

Curley explained that as they headed north in the direction of Medicine Tail Coulee, the Crow scouts divided up. White Swan and Half Yellow Face were ordered by Custer to scout in advance of his command, but instead they joined Reno's command. They remained with him until after the battle. Curley and the other three scouts, along with Boyer, moved along the ridge overlooking the Little Bighorn Valley. Custer and his command continued to remain east of the ridge that Curley and the other scouts were on. Eventually, Custer and his men made it into Medicine Tail Coulee by way of Cedar Coulee and headed toward the Little Bighorn River. Curley and Boyer spotted them from the ridge and rode down toward them. White-Man-Runs-Him, Goes Ahead, and Hairy Moccasin doubled back along the ridge. "This was the last I saw of them," Curley said of the three Crow scouts, "until some weeks after the battle."[82]

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[80] *Ibid.*
[81] Walter M. Camp, *Custer in '76: Walter Camp's Notes,* Kenneth Hammer ed. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 161.
[82] *Ibid,* 162.

Curley and Boyer caught up with Custer as they neared the river. After joining them Curley said they moved down to the river to where some of the soldiers tried to cross. They were forced back by the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, who fired at them from across the river. After this unsuccessful attempt, they retreated up the north ridge into the vicinity of Calhoun Ridge. As they retreated, hundreds of warriors began to attack them from the rear and the flanks, "going up, the Sioux on all sides except the front," said Curley. They managed to make it to the top of the ridge, but he was uncertain if any of the soldiers were killed. He remembered that the gunfire was very heavy as they ran up the ridge. "I do not know whether or not any one was killed on the way to the ridge but the firing was so heavy that I do not see how the command made the ridge without some loss." Once on top of the ridge the battle intensified, with warriors coming from every direction. "After we made the ridge just west of where Calhoun's marker is placed, we were twice ordered to load and fire together. It occurred to me at the time that this must be some signal."[83] Curley watched as the soldiers tried to hold off the advancing Sioux.

Curley later told Camp that the soldiers began to position themselves along the ridge (Calhoun Hill). Some of the men, he observed, were moving toward the north end of battle ridge (probably Custer). The battle intensified as warriors began to come from everywhere, he remembered. He saw a group of men charging the Indians, but they were cut off and a good many of them killed. The rest began to run toward the direction of last stand hill, on the west side of battle ridge. However, they were soon forced to move to the east side as warriors moved up the ravine from the direction of the river. When asked to describe the battle, he clapped his hands

[83] *Ibid.*

repeatedly and said, "heap shoot, shoot shoot."[84] Evidently, it was at this point that Boyer told Curley that Captain Tom Custer warned the Crow scouts to save themselves. Curley insisted that Boyer go with him, but Boyer claimed that he was injured too badly. .[85] Mitch Boyer was correct in his assumption that he was injured too badly, as he was killed along with the rest of Custer's detachment. Curley said, "I saw Mitch talking with the general. [He was probably referring to Captain Tom Custer] Mitch said that Custer told him the command would very likely all be wiped out and he [Tom Custer] wanted the scouts to get out if they could. I was riding my own horse. I found a dead Sioux and exchanged my Winchester for his Sharps rifle and belt of cartridges. On my saddle I had a coat made of a blanket with holes cut out for arms, and a hood over my head. In this fashion I rode out." Curley claimed that he rode east, crossing the divide into the Rosebud Valley. Then he traveled south in the direction of where they had left Terry and Gibbon.[86]

Traveling for three days, Curley came upon the steamer Far West, which was at the mouth of the Little Bighorn River because it was delivering supplies to Gibbon and Terry's commands.[87] He, at first, thought the steamer might be at the last location, near the mouth of the Bighorn River. Once he reached this point and realized that the steamer had moved, he began riding up the Bighorn in search of it. On the way he tells of killing a buffalo and roasting some meat, as he had no food with him. Tom LeForge who was detached to Captain Kirtland's command that was

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[84] Camp, *Custer in 76,* 158.
[85] *Ibid,* 167-168.
[86] For a good overview of the Battle of the Little Bighorn see Robert M. Utley, *The Little Big Horn Battlefield: A History and Guide to the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Washington D. C.: Division of Publications National Park Service, 1994); Graham, *The Story of the Little Big Horn;* Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign;* Gregory F. Michno, *Lakota Noon: The Indian Narrative of Custer's Defeat* (Montana: Mountain Press Publishing Compan, 1999); Stanley Vestal, *Warpath: The True Story of the Fighting Sioux Told in a Biography of Chief White Bull* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 191-205.
[87] Stewart, *Custer's Luck,* 249-250, 293-294, 479-480. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign,* 375-379.

guarding the wagon trains, told Thomas B. Marquis that he had seen Curley. He stated, "On Monday morning as I rambled by the river, I saw an Indian come on horseback to the opposite bank. He dismounted to build a fire and cook breakfast. By the sign-talk I learned he was Curley, the 17-year-old Crow scout. He signed an inquiry as to the whereabouts of Gen. Gibbon. I indicated he had gone up the Big Horn on the steamboat. Curley mounted and rode away in that direction. I supposed he had a dispatch. He gave no intimation that there had been a fight. He told me afterward that he was so sleepy he was thinking everybody knew about it."[88]

The next day, Curley arrived at the mouth of the Little Bighorn where he located the steamer. One of the first people to see Curley arrive at the steamer was a barber named James M. Sipes. He stated, "[I] was upriver, about a mile above the boat, fishing, with Captain Marsh, and [hospital] steward of the boat named Riley, and, also, I think, a man named Burley. We were fishing on the left bank of the Little Bighorn, and Curley rode into water on right bank, just opposite us, through brush, and forded over to us. We were much surprised, and I suspect we exhibited some fear, for he held up his hands, or gun, and made a 'peace' sign."[89]

Sergeant James E. Wilson, who was aboard the steamer wrote, "an Indian Scout named 'Curley,' known to have been with General Custer, arrived about noon with information of a battle, but there being no interpreter on board very little reliable information was obtained. He approached the steamer shouting, "Absaroka, Absaroka," which translated means, "I am Crow." The men aboard the ship appeared to be unaware of the scout's message, because none of them could speak or understand the Crow language. Curley tried desperately to tell the soldiers of

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[88] LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 247-248. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 377-378.
[89] Willert, *To the Edge of Darkness*. 24.

Custer's defeat. He placed little sticks in the ground, then with a swipe of his hands wiped them away. He pulled his hair up, and imitated a scalping.[90] The only thing the soldiers understood was that a fight had occurred. It wasn't until reports from Terry arrived from the battlefield to the steamer that the soldiers understood what Curley was trying to tell them. They immediately labeled him as the "sole survivor" of the Custer Massacre.[91]

Curley remained with the crew of the *Far West* when the wounded were being brought in from the battlefield. After the wounded were loaded, the steamer moved down the river. While on board the steamer, the crew observed that Curley was distraught about the situation he had recently witnessed. Eyewitness noted Curley's actions: "[Curley] would sit around, dejected and apparently in deep thought, humming a Crow tune, and throwing up his right hand, displayed two fingers, and said—'We got two ponies—heap Sioux – much heap Sioux—with man all dead – we got two ponies." Another witnessed explained, "There was a trail from the camp to the river. On the east side of this trail there was a large half-dead cottonwood tree. For three days and night, scout Curly staid [sic] under this tree, without food or drink, with his hair cut, mourning the loss of relations lost in the combat."[92] Although he was considered the sole survivor of the battle, he himself never laid claim to this. For the remainder of his life he continued to deny his inflated role in the battle. However, the most challenging times were still to come for the soon to be famous scout of the Crow Nation.

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[90] Camp, *Custer in 76*, 160.
[91] W. A. Graham, *The Custer Myth: A Source book of Custeriana* (Mechanicsburg, VA: Stackpole Books, 1995), 10.
[92] Willert, *To the Edge of Darkness*, 49.

On July 4, Curley finally received permission to go. He, along with Thomas Leforge and Half Yellow Face, returned to the main Crow camp located in Pryor Creek where his journey into eternal fame would begin. [93]

[93] Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 382.

CHAPTER IV – LIFE AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN

Following the defeat of Custer at the Little Bighorn, Indian forces under Sitting Bull fled toward the Bighorn Mountains. The Sioux and Cheyenne bands then separated, with some of them returning to the agency, while others headed for Canada. The Army regrouped and began an unrelenting assault on the hostiles forces.[1] The army once again approached the Crows to serve as scouts.

General Terry summoned Thomas LeForge, and instructed him to go to the main Crow camp, and obtain as many Crow warriors as he could.[2] LeForge immediately started for the Crow camp. He was accompanied by the remaining Crow scouts, including Curley. LeForge recalled an incident that occurred on the way back to the Crow camp:

"My three Crow scouts and myself wet out the following morning to find the tribal camp. A man named McCormick was traveling with us. He had some canned goods in his stock of provisions. At a camp along the way, as we prepared the meal, we put upon the fire some of the unopened cans, to heat the contents. Curly [sic] and McCormick were attending to the cooking just then. Half Yellow Face and I were sitting down and leaning back against two trees beside each other as we alternated in puffing a common smoke from my little stone medicine-pipe. The terrible warfare that was only a week in the past was being discussed. We talked of what other warfare might follow. The country was full of Sioux, and they were in high glee and full of courage because of their recent great victory. They probably would be more bold now than ever, and - 'Pop!' Curly [sic] and

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[1] LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian*, 252-253.
[2] *Ibid.*

McCormick dived for a brush thicket. Half Yellow Face and I both lay down quickly – or fell down – and went scrambling on hands and knees after our two companions. It was several seconds before we realized that the disturbing blast was caused by the explosion of one of the sealed vegetable cans being heated in the fire."[3]

Curley and his companions were obviously jumpy as they made their way back to the main camp. A few days later they arrived at the camp, where the families of the Curley, and the other scouts became overjoyed to see that they were alive. The following day, a council was held to discuss the request made by LeForge, on behalf of Terry. The tribe was apparently split, especially when considering what had been done to Custer and his command. LeForge was able to convince about fifty of the Crow warriors to go back with him so that they could defeat the Sioux.[4] For Curley, although having witnessed a devastating battle, it is likely that he returned to scouting for the army.[5] Eventually, Curley and his brethren aided the army in the defeat of the Sioux.[6] The Sioux were eventually forced back to their reservations. For a time it appeared that the Crows were heading toward a more peaceful era in their history.

Curley, again served as a scout at the newly built Fort Custer, named in honor of General George Custer. The fort had been built near the mouth of the Little Bighorn River, twelve miles north of where the Seventh Cavalry suffered its

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[3] LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian,* 254-255.
[4] *Ibid, 256-258.*
[5] His enlistment was for six months, which would likely end in September 6, 1876. He was likely a part of the expeditions against the Sioux later in the summer of 1876.. See Hammer, *Men withCuster,* 77.
[6] Thomas B. Marquis, *Custer, Cavalry & Crows: The Sioux Campaign of 1876 and March of the Montana Column from Fort Shaw & Ellis* (Colorado: The Old Army Press, 1975), 140-141.

defeat.[7] Curley enlisted several times as a scout under Lieutenant Charles Roe at Fort Custer. The date of his enlistments apparently began on Dec. 31, 1881, ending on January 31, 1883 when he was discharged. Official army reports suggest he and the other scouts performed the usual scouting tasks. The tasks included delivering messages to surrounding forts, gathering wood or providing meat for the soldiers. However, on one occasion a party of Blackfeet, from the Piegan band had stolen some stock from the Crows. It is likely that Curley was part of the Crow Scouts that pursued, and recovered the stock. The report reads: "November 8, 1882. The detachment pursued a party of hostile Indians (Piegans) and overtook them near Tullock's Fork, M.T., about 20 miles east from this Post [Fort Custer], and recaptured the stock stolen from them. One enlisted Indian Scout (Crooked Face) was wounded in the skirmish, Two Piegans reported killed."[8] This appears to be the only time that the scouts engaged in actual battle during this time. By this time Curley, as well as a handful of other scouts were already living near the future agency site, which was eventually located one mile from the site of Custer's defeat.[9]

Apparently, Curley and the other scouts felt at home near the fort. They were allowed to go hunting whenever they wanted, which was beneficial for the army as well. In this manner, explained LeForge, "their observations would be useful, equivalent to what they might be if they were continually scouring the

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[7] Richard Upton, *Fort Custer on the Big Horn, 1877-1898: Its history and personalities as told and pictured by its contemporaries* (California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1973), 16. Thomas LeForge was involved in selecting the site of the fort, which was to be named after General George Custer. See LeForge, *Memoirs of a White Crow Indian,* 281.

[8] A record of "Fort Custer Enlistments," can be found in the Curley File, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency Mt.

[9] LeForge, *Memoirs,* 281-282.

country under the exact direction of somebody."[10] Curley and the others were also not feeling like they were restricted, which would surely cause them to leave the military life.

The scouts and their families also conducted their celebrations, and adoption ceremonies near the fort. To them, explained LeForge, this was home. Curley and his companions, and their families were soon finding themselves on first name basis with the soldiers in the fort. They would chat in the mornings while watering their horses, or would go out on hunts with them. [11]

All the while, Curley and the Crows began to see a considerable amount of whites moving into the area. In 1882 the Northern Pacific Rail Road had completed their line into Montana, which made moving into the area easier.[12] We can assume that many people, including Curley, were aware of the fact that the old ways were gone. He and many others began to live like the white men did, trying their hand at farming and ranching.[13]

Yet, there was still a small group of Crows that tried to keep the traditional ways by continuing the hunt. This group however, quickly learned that leaving the reservation, or encountering whites had severe, and sometimes fatal consequences.[14] The newly arrived white settlers began to shoot Indians who were off the reservations. On one occasion in 1881, a Crow hunting party had left the reservation to hunt antelope. The hunting party split into three groups to cover

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[10] *Ibid,* 289.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] Plummer, *Crow Indians,* 192.
[13] Dan Old Elk, 2000.
[14] In one incident, LeForge and Red Wing, a Crow met some emigrants on the Bozeman Trial. They were immediately taken as prisoners by the whites, and on several occasions were almost killed, because they were thought to be Indians. See LeForge, *Memoirs,* 290-294.

more ground. One party encountered two cowboys who accused them of stealing horses. The argument escalated, resulting in the shooting and killing of one of the Crows. They hid his body in some underbrush, and left apparently never being prosecuted for the murder. The agent for the Crows reported that all white men in the surrounding area had "banded together," and declared they would "kill any Indian on sight found in the country." The agent added, "No respect was paid to Indians in the area. It is deemed no crime to kill an Indian but rather an act of heroism."[15] Many of the Crows including Curley were finding themselves prisoners in the land they once controlled.

It is likely that Curley and his people were unaware that they had aided the White man in opening the west to non-Indian settlers, which resulted in the Crows eventually losing a large portion of their land. The defeat of their enemies had not brought prosperity to the tribe, but instead it had opened the floodgates of White emigration, destroying the land and the buffalo.[16] Once the Sioux were forced out of Montana and the railroads were built, a mass of white ranchers began moving into prime grazing lands located near the borders of the Crow reservation. Many of the newly arrived ranchers felt the Crows were not utilizing the land, and began demanding the federal government place the Indians on a smaller reservation opening the surplus lands for White ranchers. The most vocal of these people was actually a leading rancher named Granville Stuart, who was married to an Indian women. He wanted the Indian lands to be allotted, with the surplus being sold to

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[15]Fredrick E. Hoxie, Fredrick Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America 1805-1935* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 111.
[16] *Ibid,* 115.

non-Indians. Stuart believed that segregating the Indians did not help them, and if they were sandwiched between whites, they would learn by example.[17]

Henry Armstrong, the Crow Indian agent during this time, shared Stuart's sentiments. He declared to his superiors in Washington D. C. that the Crows were under his control and now was the time to place them on the best portion of their reservation and open the rest to whites. He asked fellow officers at Fort Custer if lands east of the fort were, "far superior to the country around the agency?" Apparently the officers at Fort Custer felt that it was. Immediately Armstrong began devising a strategy to remove the Crows and their agency east, near Fort Custer. This fort was built in response to the defeat of Custer and the Seventh Cavalry at the Little Bighorn.[18] He wrote to his superiors in Washington, "having watched other Indian tribes during the first twenty years of my life I feel that the first, greatest and most important question affecting the Crows today is to locate them permanently on the best portion of their country... and then settle the whites around them as closely and quickly as possible."[19] It appears that Armstrong felt he was preparing the Crows for what was about to come to Montana, a mass of white settlers. He stated at the end of his letter that taking this step was essential, if not they [Crows] would "become extinct." He sent his request to Washington in 1882, but not until 1884 did he get permission to remove the Crows.[20]

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[17] Peter Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys: Native People and Cattle Ranching in the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 47-48.
[18] The United States Army built a fort in 1877, at the confluence of the Little Bighorn, and Bighorn Rivers, calling it Fort Custer. They built the fort in direct response because of the defeat of Custer and his men, on June 25, 1876. Lieutenant-General Phil Sheridan and Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry, in their reports to the Secretary of War in 1875, stressed the need for at least two forts in the area. Upton, *Fort Custer on the Big Horn 1877-1898*, 16.
[19] Hoxie, *Parading Through History*, 17-18.
[20] *Ibid.*

This was the start of the Crow reservation being reduced to a fraction of what is used to be. In the spring of 1884 the request made by agent Armstrong to remove the Crows was approved. The Crows, numbering about 3000 were forced to march over two hundred miles to the southeast corner of their former reservation. Many of the Chiefs did not agree with the move but they knew that in order to preserve what land they had, they had to abide by the governments demands.[21] Now Curley and the other Crow people found themselves living their lives in the area between Pryor Creek and the Little Bighorn.

By the late 1880's Curley relocated to a site one mile east of Last Stand Hill. The land was passed down to him from his parents who obtained the land through the Dawes Act, which was designed to turn Indians into farmers, forcing the abandonment of their traditional ways.[22] His first home near Last Stand Hill was actually the former jail. It was a small cabin given to Curley after a new jail was built. The cabin was eventually sold to Bob Edgar, who runs an old frontier town in Cody Wyoming. The cabin is displayed at the frontier town, with Curley's descendents, the Old Elk family donating many of the fixtures of the cabin.[23]

Curley was married to Bird Women, but that marriage ended in divorce. By the time he moved near the battlefield he had remarried to another Crow women named Takes-A-Shield. Takes-A-Shield eventually gave Curley his only child, who they named Dora. Unfortunately, Dora died when she was in her late teens or

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[21] Max Big Man, father of Arthur Big Man, often served as an interpreter for many of the elders including Plenty Coups, and White-Man-Runs-Him. Many of the elders always stated that they were forced to move to the present agency, and many of them knew that they had to oblige the request or become extinct. Arthur Big Man, Interview in 1992

[22] Plain Feather, *Greasy Grass*, 21.

[23] Robert Edgar, Interviewed March 2000.

early twenties, leaving behind her husband Dominic Old Elk, and a son named George.[24] Curley, devastated by the loss of his daughter adopted his grandson George. George was evidently named after General George A. Custer, who Curley admired.[25]

Curley apparently had a special relationship with his only grandson. "He and his wife loved their grandson very much," said Joe Medicine Crow who knew them personally. Joe and George were friends and went with Curley whenever he went anywhere. Many of the former scouts eventually became part of the Crow agent's police force. They were responsible for keeping peace between the people, while carrying out the agent's orders. Curley found himself a member of the Indian agents force, and eventually was appointed to serve as a tribal judge.[26] He realized that his job was helping to enforce the wishes of the Indian agent, which were usually harsh, so he resigned.[27] He came to realize that he was hurting his people, whom he had defended most of his life.

Curley's love for horses was evident as he raised horses most of his adult life. Growing up during the time he did, horses became a major part of Curley's life. Dan Old Elk, Curley's great grandson explained that his great-grandfather was very much into raising horses, and often times raised very good stock. They were considered some of the best horses in the reservation and were often borrowed for

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[24] Dan Old Elk, 2000.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] Viola, *Little Big Horn Remembered,* 131.
[27] *Ibid*

use in parades by other Crows. One of the defining features of his pinto horses was that they all had black tipped ears.[28]

Other dramatic changes occurred through Curley's lifetime. In the early part of the twentieth century Curley witnessed an event that marked the beginning of reservation life. The event was a threat of disunion within the Crow nation.[29] Differences began emerging between the different leaders of the districts over agreements with local ranchers. Plenty Coups benefited greatly as he succeeded in winning grazing leases for cooperative white stockmen and enjoyed friendly relations with the recently appointed Indian agent.[30] Meanwhile the other Crow people were barely able to get by. This resulted in the emergence of a new group to handle the affairs of the nation.

They were a younger group of men that were educated in white schools off the reservation such as Carlisle. They now returned to take their place as leaders. The only problem with these newcomers was that many of the Chiefs were still alive and many Crows continued to recognize them as the tribe's leaders. Furthermore, the younger leaders had not yet proven themselves, especially in battle, which the older chiefs had done. Tension between the traditionalist and new-era leaders began to intensify. As a result of the tensions two distinct political groups began to emerge. The Elks consisted of traditionalists such as Curley, Plenty Coups, and Pretty Eagle, while the Crow Indian Lodges consisted of the younger educated ones like Russell White Bear and Robert Yellowtail.[31] Curley, a

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[28] Dan Old Elk, Interview February 21, 2000.
[29] My sources for this incident are drawn from Fredrick Hoxie, *Parading Through History,* 238-253.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*

member of the Elks became a leader in this group along with others like Plenty Coups. When the two groups met to conduct meetings, they often quickly turned into shouting matches.

In 1909 President Taft sent a delegation headed by Secretary of the Interior, Richard Ballinger to hear the complaints of the Indians. It was a crucial time as the Crow leaders prepared to present claims of wrongdoings by former agents and white ranchers. In preparations for the delegation the Elks and Crow Indian Lodges held meetings to discuss which issues to present. In one particular meeting when the two sides were arguing a young man by the name of Russell White Bear, a former student of Carlisle Indian School stood up and made a speech. Instead of focusing on the issues at hand he focused on the division within the tribe. He stated:

"Now as we are sitting here tonight we can get up and shake hands with one another and be altogether as one people. If we can get together as a body and be that way, if we make a demand to the government, then the government will listen to us and will consider the demand we make if we are one. Right now this very minute let us quit and shake hands and take each other by the arm and hold each other up. Remember that you are Crow Indians."[32]

After his speech others stood and gave speeches but it appeared that the group was not reacting. In his quiet and reserved way Curley stood up and removed a campaign button he was wearing and stated, "as a sign that I am putting down the differences between us..." he placed the button on the ground. Others followed his lead and removed their buttons placing it on the ground next to Curley's. From this

[32] *Ibid.*

point, it appears that a new form of tribal government was established, where old and new leaders worked together. More importantly, Curley's action that day may have saved the Crows and their reservation.[33]

In 1917, a delegation of Crows went to Washington to address the President. Their purpose was to prevent a land cession from occurring which would have destroyed the Crow people. The delegates included the likes of Plenty Coups, Medicine Crow, as well as Robert Yellowtail, a Crow educated in white schools. The old warriors like Plenty Coups assisted the younger Crows, and together they successfully blocked the land cession. This was in large part because both factions of the Crow people were able to work with each other. Curley, unknowingly may have saved his people from being split, and ultimately being destroyed. [34]

Curley continued fighting for his people as the government attempted to buy more lands. In 1907 a delegation once again approached the Crows in an attempt to buy more lands from them. It was during the council held between the Crows and the government representatives that many of the Crow leaders made their feelings known to the Great White Father. One by one they stated their displeasure such as the loss of lands, or the lack of rations. Curley made the most impressive of all speeches during this council that reflects the Crows feeling toward their lands. He stated:

"I was a friend of General Custer. I was one of his scouts and will say a few words. The Great Father in Washington sent you here about this land. The soil you see is not ordinary soil- it is the dust of the blood, the flesh, and bones of our

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[33] *Ibid.*
[34] Iverson, *When Indians became Cowboys,* 64-65.

ancestors. We fought and bled and died to keep other Indians from taking it, and we fought and bled and died helping the whites. You will have to dig down through the surface before you can find nature's earth, as the upper portion is Crow. The land, as it is, is my blood and my dead; it is consecrated, and I do not want to give up any portion of it."[35]

Curley appeared to always be active in the political dealings of his Crow people. He was often part of delegations that went to Washington D.C. to address the President.[36] His biggest passion however was fighting for the rights of his River Crows. During the signing of the 1868 Fort Laramie, the River Crow band was not present. The government concluded that Blackfoot [Sits-In-the-Middle-of-the-Land], of the Mountain Crow band was representing all Crows, including the River Crows. According to Dan Old Elk, Curley and the other river Crows were upset that at the time of the treaty signing none of the River Crow Chiefs were present, and never agreed to live on a reservation. Curley believed that an injustice had occurred, but nothing was ever done by the government to resolve the issue, although he continued to fight for the River Crows.[37]

Curley also remained very active in the ceremonies that were conducted on the Crow reservation. He regularly participated in the annual tobacco ceremony, often joining the singers in singing the ceremonial songs.[38]

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[35] Dixon, *The Vanishing*, 141
[36] Dan Old Elk., 2000.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] Curley is seen participating in singing during the tobacco planting ceremony. See Lloyd G. Mickey Old Coyote and Helene Smith. *Apsaaloka*: *The Crow Nation then and now, children of the Large Beaked Bird* (Pennsylvania: MacDonald/Sward Publishing Company, 1985), 38.

Curley for the most part was a quiet and reserved man, usually not noticeable in crowds. Joe Medicine Crow remembered Curley as a soft-spoken person. "He wasn't like the other men who were quick to scold children. I remember him as being a quiet and kind man," said Joe.

Evelyn Old Elk, a tribal elder, also knew Curley as being a quiet person. She remembered seeing him at a gathering in Pryor when she was a young girl. [39] She stated: "At the time I didn't realize or know that he was a famous scout or anything like that. He was different from other men his age, often soft spoken, unlike Plenty Coups who was mean." Many of the gatherings were attended by many of the former warriors who enjoyed the celebrations. At this celebration in Pryor, Evelyn and her friends were playing and walked by the medicine lodge, which was considered very sacred by the Crows. Children were not allowed to play near the lodge, and if they did they risked sever punishment. Evelyn said, "We were just walking by when Plenty Coups began shouting at us. He grabbed a willow stick, which he used to whip my friends and I with. We started crying and ran to our parents who in turn scolded us for being near the medicine lodge."[40] From then on Evelyn and her friends disliked Plenty Coups very much, but had nice things to say about Curley.[41]

Curley, later in his life continued to be viewed as the sole Survivor of the Battle of the Little Big Horn. He was often invited to parades or fairs in which he was displayed as the only survivor. He did this gladly because of the fact that he

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[39] Pryor is the district which was located fifty miles east of the Little Bighorn Battlefield. Evelyn Old Elk is the wife of the Late George Old Elk. She was the one who told me this in an interview On February 20, 2000

[40] Evelyn Old Elk. Interview Feb. 2000.

[41] *Ibid.*

respected Custer. It became evident that while he liked being honored as Custer's scout, he did not like the situation on the reservation. On a trip east he visited a zoo and saw a bear, which was in a cage. He walked up to the bear and talked to it in the Crow Language. He said to it, "You and I are the same, my brother. You are the ones-without-fires (animals) and I am a human but we both have been imprisoned (reservation life) and are shown off as curiosities. You must pray for me and I will pray for you." Observers at the zoo thought that the bear cried.[42]

Around the time of the anniversary of the battle many people, including the press sought Curley out to tell his story of the battle. He continued to answer questions about the battle, but soon tired of the fallacies that emerged as a result of the language barrier. He exploded at one interviewer by saying, "why don't you believe my words and why do you keep trying to make me say what you want me to say?"[43] At times he rejected offers of money for interviews, and slowly tired of the publicity.[44] However, Curley did like one interviewer in particular.

Walter Camp was the engineering editor of the *Railway and Engineering Review.*

He became interested in the Custer story during this time and began to study the battle.[45] This was how he came across Curley's story of the Little Big Horn Battle. He and Curley soon began a special relationship, and it became evident that he greatly respected Curley. Camp at one point bought Curley fourteen caret gold

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[42] Plain Feather, *Greasy Grass,* 20.
[43] *Ibid,* 21.
[44] Dan Old Elk, 2000.
[45] *Ibid.*

framed eyewear.[46] Curley often told camp that he had always told the same stories, but writers often wrote something different and often fallacies.[47]

Throughout his life, Curley continued to attend special events that honored the fallen Custer. He requested to go to Monroe Michigan for the unveiling of Custer's memorial but was not able to attend for unknown reason. Fortunately he was able to go to the annual ceremonies of the Custer fight, which were conducted at the battlefield one mile from Curley's house.[48]

During one anniversary, Curley was reminded of his old Sioux enemies hate toward him. Gall a Sioux warrior who was at the fight in 1876 made a speech in which he pointed to Curley and said that if he had not been a coward during the fight, that his headstone would be there somewhere on the battlefield along side the soldiers.[49] It is uncertain how he felt about the situation because in interviews he never let his feelings be known about Gall's comments. Gall, however appeared to fear for his life whenever he participated in the ceremonies at the battlefield. He was especially fearfully when Curley was present. In one incident during the night of June 24, 1886 Gall was observed moving his belongings under a wagon. The story read, "Chief Gall was assigned a tent in the camp on the night of the 24th. About midnight he picked up his blankets and moved under a wagon. It is believed he was afraid of a blow in the dark from Curley, Custer's famous scout."[50]

In September 1909, Dr. Joseph K. Dixon approached Curley, and other scouts who were at the Little Bighorn with Custer. Apparently Dixon's intent was

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[46] Curley Collection, Little Bighorn Battlefield Library, Montana.
[47] Mardell Plainfeather, *Greasy Grass*, 19
[48] Dan Old Elk, 2000.
[49] John Doerner, Little Big Horn Battlefield Historian, Interviewed February 20, 2000.
[50] Upton, *Fort Custer on the Bighorn*, 109-110.

to interview the remaining scouts with Custer, as well as the last of the Chiefs. The meeting came to be known as the "Last Great Indian Council." Prior to the actual meeting Dixon wrote that Curley, and a few other Crows came to his camp. While at the meeting the Crows received news that another Indian [Crow] with bad intent was going to Washington to make war on the more industrious Crows. Apparently a distraught member of the Crows felt that he was being mistreated and was going to go to Washington to stir up havoc, which Curley and the others probably realized would result in unwanted trouble. Curley and the others approached Dixon trying to persuade him to intercede on their behalf in Washington. Curley pleaded with Dixon saying, "Which man would you believe, the man who is trying to raise wheat for the people to get flour and bread from, oats to feed his horses, who builds a house for the shelter and preservation of his family, builds a stable in which to shelter his horses, tills the soil to get the product, trying to raise vegetables so that his people may have something to eat in summer and winter, or the man who would come along and run over this man who was working and trying to do something for his family, and would not work himself, but just run around and make a renegade of himself, quarrelling with his mother and brothers—which man would you believe? A man who quarrels with his mother is no fit for any duty."[51] It is not known whether or not Dixon helped the Crows, but the meeting between Dixon and the Chiefs did take place.

Dixon did a variety of projects in which to preserve Indians culture. In 1909 he filmed the annual celebration of the Crows, which is called "Crow Fair." He also had the scouts reenact their movements during the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

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[51] Dixon, *Vanishing Race,* 142.

The film titled *Expedition to Crow Fair and Little Bighorn Battlefield* shows several Indians standing on a hill overlooking a valley. It appears Dixon was attempting to reenact the Crow Scouts when they were on the Crows Nest, which was the site where the Crow scouts located the Indian village. One of the Indians appeared to be Curley, who was looking out over the valley. His right hand shields the sun from his eyes, while he points with the other.[52] Curley, a person that lived during the buffalo days, now became a hero in the novels as well as in the movies.

Throughout Curley's life his relationship with the other scouts with Custer at the Little Bighorn appeared to be hostile. According to Dan Old Elk, the scouts were often asked to pose for pictures or tell their stories of the battle. Old Elk said that the three scouts Goes Ahead, Hairy Moccasin and While White-Man-Runs-Him were hostile toward him. On several occasions the three scouts posed for pictures, while Curley is left out. On another occasion White-Man-Runs-Him and Curley were asked to relate their stories by future army chief-of-staff Hugh L. Scott. While White-Man-Runs-Him attempted to tell his version of the events that occurred that day, Curley interrupted him saying that he was lying. White-Man-Runs-Him then became sulky and walked away, returning to Scott's vehicle. Scott then told them to tell their stories one at a time and not to interrupt each other.

By the early 1920's Curley had become an old man often staying at home. In the mornings he saddled his horse and rode across the river to the site of Custer's defeat. Once there he began singing honor songs for Custer and his men that died with him. Before his death he was in the process of petitioning the government in order to receive a pension for his services during the Sioux Wars. He was fortunate

[52] Curley collection, Little Bighorn.

to be successful in his attempt to get the pension, which amounted to twenty dollars a month. Once the press received the news of his pension white Indian War Veterans became outraged. In one letter written to *Winners of the West* publication an unknown author wrote:

"Did you know that Curley, the Crow scout, received $20.00 per month pension, and that he was paid back pension for 47 years, amounting to over $11,000?" This report was quickly sent to a man by the name of Comrade Baron, of Hardin Montana who replied: "Our information is that Curley, Crow scout with General George A. Custer on that fatal day of June 25th, 1876, was granted a pension by Congress of $20 per month, and also that he received $11,280 in cash, representing back pension for 47 years. I believe every Wyoming and Montana paper had an article about it."[53] However the rumor was false, and was set straight by Mr. Asbury, Indian Agent for the Crows at this time. Comrade Baron at a later date responded writing: "I just learned today through Major Asbury, Indian agent at the Crow Agency, that Curley the scout, got a pension all right, but it only dated back to 1917. So that explodes the story about him getting 47 years of back pension. As this comes straight from the agent, you can rest assured of its accuracy."[54] Others were disturbed that Curley received a pension at all. In one letter to the *Winners of the west,* the author, W. Thornton Parker wrote: "An item in the Republican of yesterday states that Curley, a Crow scout, has received a pension certificate, claiming to be a survivor of the Custer massacre. This will be some what surprising to many old Indian war veterans who believe that the horse

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[53] Comrade Baron, *Winners of the West.* Volume 1 No. 3 (February 1924), 14.
[54] *Ibid.*

Comanche was the only survivor of that dreadful catastrophe." He went on to say: "When the brave soldiers who served in other contingents of Gen. Custer's command most gallantly have only the ordinary pension of $20 a month, it seems almost incredible that an Indian scout should receive any pension at all. At one point Parker wrote: "In one case at least, one of the brave troopers serving in Reno's contingent in the general battle of the little Big Horn died a few weeks ago in the cold of winter. An increase in pension might have saved his life." He concluded by writing: "as Gen. Godfrey is an unquestioned authority on Indian war in general and Gen. Custer's last battle in particular, old Indian war veterans, few of whom of any command survive, will be astonished to learn that an Indian enrolled as "scout," has received a pension."[55] Many former veterans of the Indian wars felt the same contempt for Indian Scouts, especially when they received a pension. However, they neglect the heroism many of the scouts like Curley displayed during the Indian wars. They often delivered messages for the army through hostile country, or fought side by side with the soldiers. Unfortunately, many of the true heroes of the Indian wars have been forgotten by the ignorant few.

For example, White Swan who was with Reno's men in the valley fight found himself on Reno Hill surrounded by hundreds of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors. He fought side by side with white soldiers, and was wounded as a result. He survived the wounds, living a long life. Because of the injuries he sustained from the battle on Reno Hill he received a disability pension, which was well deserved for his role in the battle.[56] Half Yellow Face was in a similar situation as

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[55] Thortan Parker, *Winners of the West,* Volume 1 No. 4 (March 1924), 1.
[56] Viola, *The Little Bighorn Remembered,* 126-127.

White Swan during the battle. The two Crow scouts were with Reno during the battle. Half Yellow Face successfully made it to the river through a hoard of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, returning with water for the wounded soldiers. On one of the trips Half Yellow Face took a young white soldier to help carry the canteens, and both returned safely with water. After the battle, the young white soldier received the Congressional Medal of Honor for going to the river. Half Yellow Face, who made several trips for the soldiers was never given any medals, or never interviewed by the press.[57] He could have easily escaped, but instead decided to help the wounded. Many of the people who criticized Curley never mentioned these heroes, but were quick to judge Curley.

The end came for Curley on May 21, 1923 as a result of complications from pneumonia. The majority of his adult life was filled with controversy, because of the simple fact that he left the battle when he was told to do so. He followed orders like any soldier would, but instead he was viewed by whites as a "Noble Red Man." If he had fought against Custer at the Little Bighorn, it is likely that his name would have ever been mentioned with any sort of kindness.

Shia-shia, or Curley as whites called him lived a fascinating life, witnessing many changes. He witnessed a change that resulted in the loss of a way of life forever and the start of a new way of life. He lived during a time when the buffalo was the most important thing to his people. Many of his days were spent riding across wide ranges of open prairie, much of it never before seen by white men. He lived through a dangerous time, one in which war and death became a way of life. He was a participant in one of the most famous battles in American history. He also

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[57] *Ibid,* 117.

witnessed the reduction of Crow lands, which were being taken at an alarming rate. Through it all he maintained that he did nothing great.

If he were alive today, to see what his world had come to, would he have done it again? The answer would probably be yes. If he knew that the Crows were able to survive and continue to be Crows, it is likely that he would have repeated his role in the

Battle of the Little Bighorn.

CHAPTER V - THE CURLEY CONTROVERSY

Ever since Curley was identified as the sole survivor of the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, he found himself in the midst of considerable controversy. Many historians of the battle have viewed Curley as a liar who only wanted fame. As a result, his version of what happened on that Sunday afternoon between the Indians and the Seventh Cavalry has not been readily accepted. Despite the fact that Curley maintained he did nothing out of the ordinary, and simply left the battle when he was told to do so, controversy has followed him, even after his death. There are several reasons why Curley's version of the battle has been criticized. The major reason can be directly attributed to Curley's claim of being with Custer's command on Battle Ridge toward the end of the fight.[1]

The Three Crow scouts - White-Man-Runs-Him, Hairy Moccasin, and Goes Ahead - who were with Curley and Custer that afternoon, claimed that Curley had left before the battle started and consequently was not with them. Curley's escape from the battlefield, amidst hundreds of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, has also been examined and reexamined. As a result, Curley's own accounts have been challenged. Several stories about his escape emerged shortly after the battle, many of which were false. Although Curley never made up the stories, they eventually overshadowed both his character and credibility.

Curley's arrival at the steamer *Far West* also became crucial because many people tried to disclaim his account by pointing to various discrepancies in the story. Curley claimed to have reached the *Far West* three days after the battle, but

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[1] Curley's account of his role in the battle can be found in Camp, *Custer in 76,* 161-173.

members of the staff on the steamer contradicted his claim, claiming that he arrived on June 27.[2]

Soon, many other questions began to arise regarding Curley and his claims. The major question involved whether or not Curley was actually with Custer on Battle Ridge. This became the crucial question for many people, as they tried to piece together what happened to Custer and his men. White-Man-Runs-Him, Hairy Moccasin and Goes Ahead all reported that Curley was nowhere near Custer and his command as they fought the hostiles on Battle Ridge. The three scouts claimed that they were with Custer until Medicine Tail Coulee, where Mitch Bouyer supposedly dismissed them. On the other hand, Curley maintained that the three scouts were not with Custer's command but had remained on a high bluff to the south of Medicine Tail Coulee. The conflicting stories of the Crow scouts persuaded many others to also question Curley's version of the events that unfolded that day.

White-Man-Runs-Him, quoted in Colonel W. A. Graham's book, *The Custer Myth,* claimed that Curley had left the three scouts before they made it to Medicine Tail Coulee. He stated:

> "There were only three of us, Hairy moccasin, Goes Ahead and myself. We did not see Curley. Mitch Boyer told us to go back. He said 'You go back to the pack train and let the soldiers fight.' We went back and met some soldiers and soon after that the pack train was there. If those soldiers hadn't turned back and been reinforced by the pack train they would all have been killed. The Sioux were coming up fast. Curley would have been one of the live ones because he was with the Arikarees and the horses. There were older men with me and they all said my story was true as much as they could remember in all the excitement; but I did not see Curley at all when he went back to the pack train." He also reported that the Arapahoes [more than likely a typo, probably should read Arikarees] left with horses, and they claimed that Curley was with them. White-Man-Runs-Him also stated, "Hairy Moccasin and Goes Ahead say the same story as I tell. I tell the

[2] Stewart, *Custer's Luck,* 294-295.

story from the scout's standpoint."[3] He also claimed not to have seen Curley until later that fall.[4]

It is unclear in White-Man-Runs-Him's story as to who he is referring to when he states, there were "older men" who could confirm his story. If he is referring to Goes Ahead and Hairy Moccasin, then the problem increases.

Hairy Moccasin gave a rather vague story regarding Curley and his movements that day when he stated:

> "When we separated Half-Yellow-Face and White Swan were ordered to go with Reno. Goes-Ahead, White-Man-Runs-Him, Curley and myself were ordered with Custer. We came down and crossed Reno Creek. Mitch Boyer was ahead with the four scouts right behind. Custer was ahead of his command a short distance behind us. Custer yelled to us to stop, then told us to go to the high hill ahead (the high point just north of where Reno later entrenched). From here we could see the village and could see Reno fighting. We four scouts turned and charged north to where Custer was headed for. Three of us stopped to fire into the village. We saw no more of Curley after that. I don't know where he went."[5]

As for Goes-Ahead, he was also sure that Curley was not with the three scouts. He believed that Curley had left but never indicated the exact location of his departure.[6] This raises the question of where exactly Curley departed from the group. But why were the three scouts so unclear as to when Curley left? Why didn't White-Man-Runs-Him, the oldest of the group, watch Curley more closely? This is one question that will probably never be answered.

It does appears that the four Crow scouts at one point were all together, but as to the recollection of Curley's departure, White-Man-Runs-Him, Hairy

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[3] Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 16 .
[4] *Ibid*
[5] *Ibid*, 25.
[6] *Ibid*, 20.

Moccasin, and Goes-Ahead all told different stories. Curley's version of the separation varies considerably from the other three:

> "These three Crows (White-Man-Runs-Him, Hairy Moccasin, Goes-Ahead) were with Bouyer and me as far as the bluff at the cut bank just south of Ford B and about 1500 ft. from that ford (Ford B represents Medicine Tail Coulee). While we were there, Custer's command have in sight, galloping right down the coulee toward the river. Bouyer now said he would cut across and meet it, and he started down off the east slope of the bluff and I with him. Here Hairy Moccasin, Goes-Ahead, and White-Man-Runs-Him turned tail and put back up the river following our trail along the bluffs. Hairy Moccasin, White Man, and Goes Ahead got away when Mitch Bouyer went down to see what Custer intended to do, as Custer was coming down Dry Creek (Camp often referred to Medicine Tail Coulee as Dry Creek). Then the 3 Crows shipped our without leave and went south along bluffs. This was the last I saw of them until I met them on the Yellowstone some weeks later, but they have told me that they retreated as far as Sundance Creek (Reno Creek)."[7]

The three apparently told Curley afterwards that they met Gibbons' Crow Scouts on the Yellowstone River while returning to the main camp. They told Gibbon's Crow scouts of Custer's defeat, and afterwards they all returned to the main camp where they reported the death of Curley, White Swan, and Half Yellow Face.[8]

However, the credibility of the three scouts, Goes Ahead, Hairy Moccasin, and White-Man-Runs-Him, can also be questioned. The three reported that after Bouyer released them, they joined Major Marcus Reno and his men on Reno Hill. By this time, Reno had been routed in the valley fight and was forced to retreat to a bluff, now called Reno Hill.[9] The three Crow scouts claimed that they stayed with

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[7] Camp, *Custer in 76,* 162.
[8] *Ibid*
[9] Graham, *The Story of the Little Big Horn,* 37-49.

Reno's command, and then left near sunset.[10] However, none of the men who were on Reno hill, Indian or white ever mentioned seeing the Crows there after 4:45 pm on the evening of the 25th.[11] Some of the men on Reno Hill claimed that the trio left sometime around 4:45 P.M. The Crow scouts claim of leaving near sunset seems to be false.[12] During this time of year it got dark after 9:00 P.M. If in fact they did leave at this time, the three scouts would have had to make their escape through hundreds of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, who by this time completely surrounded Reno and his men. The certainty in all of this is that the three scouts did return to the Crow camp and reported that Curley was dead without any solid evidence.[13] If they knew he left the battle early, then why would they report his death? The relatives of the supposedly dead scouts began mourning only to find out that they were alive when they arrived to the main camp unharmed sometime on July 6th.[14] It appears that the animosity between Curley and the three scouts began from this point on.

The animosity between them continued well into their adult lives. On one occasion when General Hugh L. Scott was interviewing Curley and White-Man-Runs-Him the animosity was apparent. A note by the interpreter and stenographer read:

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[10] Viola, *Little Big Horn Remembered,* 158-60.
[11] Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign,* 351-353.
[12] *Ibid*
[13] *Ibid*
[14] *Ibid,* 382.

"While White Man Runs Him was talking, Curley often interrupted him and laughed and said he was telling many lies. Then he became sulky and went back and got in the machine. General Scott told them to talk one at a time."[15]

Curley's escape from the battle also became a point of controversy as many people felt that he should have remained with Custer. Often the role of a scout in the United States Army is overlooked, or many people are misinformed as to a scout's duty. The primary job of a scout such as Curley was to find the camp, which he and the others did. Yet they were still viewed as cowards. Curley, in particular, has felt the majority of this criticism because he left the battle. In Edgar I. Stewarts book, *Custer's Luck*, Stewart wrote:

"This Indian scout- (Curley) has probably been the victim of more apocryphal tale-telling than any other charter in western history, with the exception of Buffalo Bill. For a long time hailed as the only survivor of the 'massacre,' he was subsequently called a liar, a coward, and a poltroon, among other things, when he was actually none of them. He never claimed to have been in the battle; in fact, he admitted from the beginning that he was not present when the Custer fight began."[16]

The nature of Curley's escape also contributed to the negative view of his account of the battle. Dan Old Elk retold one of the wildest stories concerning Curley's escape. He stated:

"In one of the stories concerning him (Curley), during the height of the battle he looked around and saw a dead horse. He crawled over to it, gutted the animal out and crawled into the stomach remaining there until the end of the battle. He then crawled out and rode away undetected until he reached the steamer *Far West* where he reported Custer's defeat."[17]

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[15] Graham, *The Custer Myth*, 14.
[16] Stewart, *Custer's Luck*, 478-479.
[17] Dan Old Elk, Interview, 2000

Thus, Curley's escape from then on became a major point of criticism. Other stories began circulating, all of which were false. Curley told Walter Camp the story of his escape stating:

"I escaped by riding to the right and front through dust and powder smoke, pulling over my head a cape made by cutting up blankets, which I had tied to my saddle. The Sioux appeared not to discover my identity. I was dressed in shirt and leggins[sic], abut[sic] the same as the Sioux, most of whom had their faces and clothing painted in striking colors."[18]

Stories began circulating shortly after the battle in which the blanket story was blown out of proportion. According to Mardell Plainfeather, former historian at Little Bighorn Battlefield, "His stories (Curley), as they were interpreted, were an open invitation for any crackpot newspaper writer to embellish upon outrageously, make fun of, or to critically misjudge and misquote."[19]

Many of the stories originated from people wanting publicity, which was the case with James Coleman, a whiskey peddler who was on the steamer *Far West*. Coleman falsely reported Curley's story regarding the Sioux blanket. He said that he heard Curley crawled for two miles wrapped in a Sioux blanket.[20] This story, although false, was readily accepted by writers as if it came from Curley himself.

Another controversy that was no fault of Curley was the day he claimed to have arrived at the steamer *Far West.* The date according to Curley was June 28th, "I arrived at the steamer about the middle of the forenoon of the third day [June 28]

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[18] Camp, *Custer in 76,* 163.
[19] Plainfeather, *Greasy Grass*, 20.
[20] *Ibid.*

having been three nights on the way."[21] Apparently Curley rode back to the last place he had seen the steamer, expecting to find it still there. Orders were given to Marsh to take supplies to Terry and Gibbon, so the steamer departed, moving up the Bighorn to the mouth of the Little Bighorn. However, the steamer had overshot its intended location by thirteen miles. Apparently Captain Baker, who commanded the boat guard, challenged Marsh's identification of the Little Bighorn. As a result the steamer and its crew traveled an extra thirteen miles, finally returning to the mouth of the Little Bighorn on the morning of the 28th. Marsh, attempting to protect Brown, dropped June 26th from his itinerary. Everyone aboard the steamer admitted this overrun. Because of the differences in dates, Curley's credibility is once again challenged, although he was correct in his date of arrival. Walter Camp, a person who believed Curley's story, even accepted Marsh's date over Curley's.[22]

Americans realized that the Battle of the Little Bighorn was a significant event. After Custer and his men were killed they became national heroes. Men who had no connection with the battle began making claims of being the sole survivor. E. A. Brininstool, author of *Troopers with Custer* wrote that to his knowledge fourteen people have made this claim.[23]

For example, in 1913 a man by the name of Alfred Chapmen claimed that he was the Chief of Scouts for Custer and was the sole survivor. However, Charles Varnum was the Chief of scouts for Custer and had no recollection of Chapmen.[24]

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[21] Camp, *Custer in 76*, 164.
[22] Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign*, 378-379.
[23] E. A. Brininstool, *Troopers with Custer: Historic Incidents of the Battle of the Little Big Horn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), 243.
[24] Brian W. Dippie, *Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 82-83.

One of the reasons that many claimed to be the only survivor was partly because of a letter written by Gen. E. S. Godfrey in 1926. Godfrey was a lieutenant in the Seventh Cavalry, and was with Benteen's command at the Little Bighorn. The letter reads:

> "About the last of July or the first of August, 1876, Gen. Terry moved his command from Pease Bottom down the Yellowstone River, opposite, and just above, the mouth of the Rosebud. Here some infantry troops were ferried to the south band of the stream. Soon after, I hear a rumor that they had found a dead horse that was fully equipped, except bridle, and that it was a Seventh Cavalry horse. I went to the steamer at once to investigate. I crossed to the south bank of the stream and found the horse. It was impossible to determine if it was a sorrel or light bay animal. Halter, lariat, saddle, saddle blanket and saddlebags were intack; and strapped to the cantle was the small grain bag with which the Seventh Cavalry had provided itself. The oats in the bag had not been disturbed. The saddlebags were empty. I was told that when first discovered, the carbine of the rider was there. The horse had been shot in the forehead, which must have been fatal on the spot."[25] Unfortunately, Godfrey had to return aboard the steamer for its departure, on when he returned he claimed that the horse had been stripped. He wrote, "the animal was lying on its left side, and where the body touched the soil was so decomposed that the brands could not be identified. Endeavors to locate the taken equipment were in vain, and I never leaned any thing further, either of horse of rider."[26]

No solid evidence has ever been found regarding the claim of Godfrey, but quickly, Curley played second string to slew of mysterious survivors of the battle, all of whom were supposedly white.

After the news of Curley's death was reported to America, and that he was considered to be the sole survivor of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, many people began challenging that fact. A series of letters were written to the *Winners of the West* publication contradicting that Curley was the only survivor. In one letter written by William P. Bolin of Co. A 6th U. S. Inf. And Co. K. 11th Inf. he wrote:

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[25] Brininstool. *Troopers with Custer*. P. 247-248
[26] *Ibid*

"Dear Sir: I read an article in your valuable little paper about Curley the Crow scout with General Geo. A. Custer on the morning of June 25, 1876. He was not there, but near there." Apparently Mr. Bolin had received this news from the Sioux while he acted as an interpreter at the Standing Rock Agency. He continued, "this horse Commanche, a beautiful mouse colored and spirited animal was the only living thing, man or beast, if you pleas, that ever came out of that fight alive. He was wounded twice. I do not remember what company he belonged to. He was led around and exercised by a halter only. Now as to Curley. On the morning of June 25, 1876, between dawn and sun up, Custer and his command, 263 men, including himself and a scout (not Curley). I have forgotten the scout's name, however he is there yet, and was killed along with the rest of the brave and noble soldiers."[27]

Mr. Bolin continues about talking about his sources for a short while then concludes his story saying:

"I have heard and read so much about the Crow Indian Scout Curley that it got on my nerves, and I just couldn't resist any longer telling what I know about him, and he being the only survivor of the Custer fight. Don't you believe it. The idea of him covering himself up with an Indian blanket and laying there as if dead and the Indians walking over him thinking him dead. It never happened. Don't you know, or rather anyone knows, who has been among the real Indians, no the show kind (Coffee Coolers) we would call them, that if an Indian saw another Indian lying as if dad on a battlefield, that they would turn him over to see who he was and to be sure whether he was a dead one or not? Well I should say so. I for one know the Indian too well to believe anything like that. I wouldn't w ant to call a man a liar, as that means a fight, and I am too old to fight any more, 'but there was a time.' But I will say, he or someone handles the truth very carelessly. That is all I have to say at this time."[28]

Apparently Mr. Bolin resented the fact that an Indian emerged from the battle as the only survivor, and received so much attention.

Another letter, written by an Indian war veteran named W. Thornton Parker, M. D. was similar to Bolin's in contradicting Curley, and his role in the battle writing:

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[27] William P. Bolin. *Winners of the West.* Volume 1, No. 8 (July 1924), 1.

> "An item in the Republican of yesterday states that Curley, a Crow scout, has received a pension certificate, claiming to be a survivor of the Custer massacre. This will be somewhat surprising to many old Indian war veterans who believe that the horse Comanche was the only survivor of that dreadful catastrophe where so many gallant soldiers perished in the short struggle of an hour in Gen. Custer's personal contingent."[29]

However, a veteran of the battle defended Curley and the absurd stories regarding his escape. Theodore W. Goldin, a member Troop G., Seventh Cavalry, wrote a letter to the *Winners of the West* stating:

> "Curley the Crow was with General Custer when I left the column, he with Mitch Bouier [sic] and several other Crows, only one of whom is living today and whom I saw on a visit to the battlefield on the 48th anniversary in June last. I also saw Curley after the fight and heard his story, in fact several of them. There has always been a doubt in the minds of officers and men who were in the battle as to just when Curley left Custer, however, in no statement ever made by Curley did he claim to have covered himself with a Sioux blanket and lain down on the field as if dead. Dozens of imaginative reporters from time to time have written of Curley, evidently allowing their imagination full rein regardless of facts."[30]

Since the Battle of the Little Big Horn occurred, it has received much attention, easily becoming one of the most studied battles in American history. Historians often overlook Curley and his accounts, sometimes briefly mentioning him. In some instances he is altogether ignored. There are some historians who use Curley's accounts, but still believe that he was not near Custer's command at the end of the battle.

For example, Mari Sandoz, author of several books about the battle uses Curley and the Crow accounts, but believes that Curley left early in the battle, while the other three Crow Scouts (Goes Ahead, Hairy Moccasin, and White-Man-Runs-

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[28] *Ibid.*
[29] W. Thornton Parker *Winners of the West,* Volume 1, No. 4 (March 1924), 1.
[30] Theo W. Goldin, *Winners of the West* Volume 1 No. 9 (August 1924), 4.

Him) remained with Custer. In her book, *The Battle of the Little Big Horn,* she places Curley's departure at a ridge south of Medicine Tail Coulee. Sandoz believes that Curley did not go down into the coulee with Bouyer to meet Custer like Curley claimed. Instead, Sandoz believes that before leaving to catch up with Custer, Bouyer told Curley, "You are very young. You don't know much about fighting. Go back keep away from the Sioux, and go to those other Soldiers, there at the Yellowstone. Tell them all of us are killed here."[31] She says that White-Man-Runs-Him, Goes Ahead, and Hairy Moccasin were with Custer up until his command reached the ridge north of Medicine Tail Coulee, where much of the fighting occurred. It was at this point where Sandoz says that the three Crow scouts were released by Bouyer who said to them, "Save yourselves."[32]

Robert M. Utley, a noted historian of the battle, apparently did not view Curley's story as worth using. In his book, *Cavalier in Buckskin,* he never so much as mentions Curley. The nearest Utley comes to mentioning Curley is when he writes, "The Crow scouts, released by Custer from the coming fight, watched part of it from a slope overlooking Medicine Tail Coulee from the south, but their recollections were badly garbled."[33] Apparently, Utley did not find any of the Crow accounts useful in reconstructing Custer's movements.

Another historian who did not believe in Curley, or his accounts of the battle, is Joseph Medicine Crow. He stated that Curley was a young boy at the

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[31] Mari Sandoz. *The Battle of the Little Big Horn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978),118-119.
[32] *Ibid*
[33] Robert M. Utley. *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988) 186-187.

time, and did not know much.[34] In the book, *Little Big Horn Remembered,* Medicine Crow wrote about the Crow scouts with Custer. Regarding Curley, Medicine Crow wrote:

"But what about Curley, the youngest of the Crow scouts? White-Man-Runs-Him, Goes Ahead, and Hairy Moccasin all later said that Curley had left earlier with some Arickara scouts who left Major Reno before his attack. That is why Curley was the first to bring out the news of what happened. After watching the final moments of the action on 'Last Stand Hill' from a distant butte, Curley raced northward. In surprisingly short time he found a boat coming up the Yellowstone River and reported that Custer and his soldiers had been killed."[35]

What is striking about Medicine Crow's statement regarding Curley was how Curley found a boat on the Yellowstone River, "in a surprisingly short time". In fact it took Curley three days to find the *Far West*, which is a long period of time to ride a horse over rough terrain. Apparently Medicine Crow does not consider Curley's statement as credible.

E. A. Brininstool had this to say about Curley and his account of the battle:

"It has always been alleged that Curley escaped from the battle in the dust, smoke and general confusion, by disguising himself in a Sioux blanket. This claim is absurd. The Sioux were not overlooking anybody on that particular day, and if Curley ever did make such claims, they can be taken with several grains of salt. Curley's get-away was obviously made before the actual fighting commenced."[36]

One thing that should be mentioned is that during Curley's escape, there were hundreds of warriors surrounding Custer's command. It is likely that the Sioux did not overlook anybody that day, but when considering the mass of warriors, not to mention the smoke and dust, Curley could possible have been overlooked. Some estimates suggest there were approximately 2,000 warriors in

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[34] Joseph Medicine Crow, Interviewed February 2000.
[35] Viola. *The Little Bighorn Remembered*, 117-118.
[36] Brininstool. *Troopers with Custer,* 244.

the Sioux and Cheyenne camp that day.[37] It is impossible for warriors to know every warrior in the entire camp. More than likely, with the dust and confusion, Curley or any of the scouts could have easily ridden out unharmed and unnoticed.

The site of Custer's defeat is now the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. Every year thousands of visitors flock to the park. In 1988 Robert Utley wrote the official handbook for the park. Unfortunately, Curley and his involvement in the battle were again overlooked. It is evident that his story was not considered worth reporting. What was written in regards to any survivors was written about Comanche, Captain Keogh's horse. The paragraph reads:

"Not all was death on the battlefield. A few badly wounded cavalry horses were found, then destroyed. One was not, Comanche, Captain Keogh's claybank gelding, was spared and his wounds dressed. Never again put to work, Comanche survived for another 15 years, the 7th Cavalry's prized living trophy, venerated as the only true survivor of Custer's Last Battle."[38] Evidently the park service did not consider Curley as a survivor of Custer's command.

On the other hand, Evan S. Connel, author of, *Son of the Morning Star* believes that Curley was in the battle. He writes:

"Curly did go with Custer and he did survive, but he did not accompany G.A.C. all the way. Nor was he expected to. The Rees and Crows had been employed to locate the Sioux, nothing else. They had not been hired to fight alongside Reno in the Valley."[39]

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[37] Stewart, *Custer's Luck*, 271.
[38] Utley, *Battlefield Handbook*, 73.
[39] Evan S. Connel. *Son of the Morning Star: Custer and the Little Bighorn* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), 314-315.

Edgar I. Stewart also believed in Curley, and his testimony about the battle. He used Curley, White-Man-Runs-Him, Hairy Moccasin, and Goes Ahead as his sources regarding Custer and his movements during the final phases of the battle. He writes: "All the information we have, and it is little enough, is based on the testimony of the four Crow scouts who escaped and who apparently witnessed at least a part of the battle even if they did not participate in it."[40]

Among the Crow people, these scouts are all but forgotten. Only the descendents, as well as many of the elders have any recollection of Curley, White-Man-Runs-Him, Goes Ahead, and Hairy Moccasin. The descendents of each scout continue to retell stories that were passed down to them through oral histories.

Meanwhile, many Crow elders, although aware of who the scouts were, often do not attempt to tell what they had heard about them. For example, Hannah Morrison stated that she did not know much about Curley, but Evelyn Birdinground did. She also stated that Dan Old Elk, or any of the great-grandsons would probably be more reliable sources.[41] Gerald Reed, who is in his early seventies also responded in the same way as Mrs. Morrison.[42] Apparently many of the elders were skeptical about giving any false information.

Whatever the case, Curley has become one of the most noted members of the Crow Nation but not without controversy. He lived a life filled with controversy, yet managed to become a leader among his people.

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[40]Stewart. *Custer's Luck,* 431.
[41] Hannah Morrison, interviewed January 2001.
[42] Gerald Reed interviewed February 2000.

CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSION

In April of 1876, a young seventeen-year old Crow Warrior decided that he was going to join the white man's army and help fight the Sioux. He was unaware that his actions three months later would make him a famous man. Growing up among his Crow people, he had an ambition to become a noted warrior. However, he did not bargain for the fame that he received as he became identified as the sole survivor of one of the greatest battles in American History. He has been identified as many things, ranging from a coward, to a hero, to a liar. He had always maintained that he was not in the battle, but all his talking did not help his situation, and eventually, he quit denying the rumors.

It is highly probable that Curley did not understand the significance of the battle he was involved with. The Battle of the Little Bighorn has come to represent a variety of things. For example, for the Sioux, and their allies it represented a "Last Stand." Most people consider the "last stand" to be Custer's, but in reality the Indian forces that defeated Custer were doomed after their victory. These tribes had resisted the white mans world, but eventually, the more numerous whites subdued the last of the holdouts. Many great leaders were now succumbing to this new way of life, one in which they became completely dependent on the government for their survival. The Battle of the Little Bighorn was the greatest victory for the Sioux, but in reality it marked the beginning of the end for the forces that defeated Custer in 1876.

The Crows also became much like the Sioux, although many had served as scouts against the Sioux. They too suffered the same fate as they witnessed their lands being reduced at an alarming rate. Custer and the Battle of the Little Bighorn have come to represent the end of a way of life. The Crows found that the once constant inter-tribal wars were now far and few between, resulting in warriors unable to make a name for themselves. The once abundant buffalo began to disappear from the lives of the Crows as well. For the Crows, the battle only seemed to delay white migration into Crow lands.

As for Curley, the Battle of the Little Bighorn represented a significant event in his life, which he did not fully understand. It came to dominate the remainder of his adult life. It appeared that controversy surrounded him at all times. Throughout it all Curley maintained that he did nothing great, and left when he was told to do so. In the beginning America embraced him, especially when he was thought to be the sole survivor or Custer's command. But by the end of his life, his story had been shunned, and in most cases disregarded. However, many fail to realize the contribution that he made for his people. He represented the Crows well in the white world, attending parades and gatherings, where he held his head high. When asked about his involvement in the battle, he retold the same story. Unfortunately, when it was printed, it often seemed to have been changed and embellished. His story had been filled with lies, all of which were written by greedy, ambitious writers. Throughout it all, he nevertheless emerged as one of the great leaders of the Crow Nation.

Curley's younger days were rather normal, considering that he grew up in a hostile environment. He was raised to fight and kill the Sioux, an enemy that was considered to be the fiercest of the Plains Indians by white America. He and many of his Crow brethren accepted the fact that the Sioux greatly outnumbered the Crows, but by the time of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, young Curley had already participated in four raids against the Sioux. Along with warriors such as Plenty Coups, and Two Leggings, Curley readily risked his life day after day, knowing that he could be killed. He accepted that fact, and throughout the Indian Wars, fulfilled his promises of being a scout for the army, which eventually brought him worldwide attention.

His road to fame began in April of 1876 when he enlisted in the army as a scout against he Sioux. He did not realize what lay in store for him once he and five other Crows joined Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer and the Seventh Cavalry as they headed toward the Little Bighorn. He emerged from the battle not having done anything great but simply leaving, after he was ordered to do so. He carried the news of Custer's defeat to the *Far West* where he became recognized as the sole survivor of Custer's command.

The press quickly took to the young Crow scout and set into motion a series of false stories, none of which Curley claimed he did, but were readily accepted. At the same time, the other Crow scouts who were with Curley at the Little Bighorn became openly jealous. They branded Curley a liar. White-Man-Runs-Him, Goes Ahead and Hairy Moccasin openly expressed their opinions of Curley. Conflict arose, with his own people accusing him of lying, which was not the case. Even

after his death he had been greatly criticized, not only by Indians, but also by whites. Most of his critics felt that Curley was dishonest, and they felt that he should not have received so much attention. On the other hand it appears that many had a racist view toward Curley. This became evident when many white war veterans despised the fact that Curley received a pension. A pension they felt Curley did not deserve.

In the eyes of most Crows, Curley has become a controversial figure. Many of the descendents of other scouts continue to tell stories of what their ancestors had done in the battle. However, none of them have come close to accomplishing what Curley has in his lifetime. He had withstood conflict from both Indians and whites. Throughout it all he continued to honor his fallen commander, George Custer.

He also made a transition that many Indians could not make. Throughout the history of the Crows, nothing was as devastating as the time they were forced to abandon their old way of life. Not even the inter-tribal warfare that existed on the plains was a match to the events that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Crows, who once hunted the buffalo, were now reduced to depending on the government. Diseases hit the Crows hard taking the lives of many people.

Although Curley did not accomplish the four tasks to become a chief, he became a chief in his own right. Curley represented a new type of warrior, one who understood the ways of the white man, and adapted to this new life. Curley was unique, living during the time of the buffalo, than continuing to live on the reservation. Two Leggings, a warrior who lived during Curley's lifetime regarded

the reservation period as a time when life ended. After moving onto the reservation, Two Leggings remarked that: "Nothing happened after that. We just lived. There were no more war parties, no more capturing horses from the Piegans and the Sioux, no buffalo to hunt. There is nothing more to tell." As for Curley, his life was just beginning during this time. Curley quickly took the place of the old chiefs who did not understand the new world they were entering. Curley appeared to be aware of the fact that he had to adapt, or just die.

Throughout these hardest of times, Curley managed to rise to prominence among his people. This was due in large part because of his role in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Curley went as a representative to Washington D. C. several times to help preserve what little land the Crows had left. Yet, many Crow people today only know him as the sole survivor of Custer's command, and consider Plenty Coups or Pretty Eagle to be the last Chiefs of the Crow people. Curley, however, set a model of what future leaders of the Crow should be like. He continued to live a traditional life, participating in the various ceremonies of the Crow, but at the same time realizing that in order to survive he had to adapt. Curley adapted and lived a full life, finally being laid to rest on the same battlefield that brought him national attention.

The words of Fredrick Hoxie can be an example of the life Curley lived. Hoxie said, "The Crows were not coming to America, America came to the Crows." As America came to the Crows only a few were ready for the journey ahead of them, and Curley was one of the first to accept that challenge. A challenge that still exist today for many Crows, who can credit Curley for setting an example.

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