

Excerpts of the Accounts of the Crow Scouts about the Battle of the Little Bighorn

Hairy Moccasin, *The Custer Battle Book* by Herbert Coffeen, A Reflection Book, Carlton Press, Inc., New York, 1964 p 48

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. He had crossed the creek. Everything was a scramble with lots of Sioux. The battle was over in a few minutes. We thought they were all killed.

Goes Ahead, Crow Scout, 5 August 1909, with Russell White Bear, Interpreter. Interview by Walter M. Camp. See Walter Camp field notes, folder 59, BYU Library. See *Custer in '76: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight*, edited by Kenneth Hammer, University of Oklahoma Press, page 174.

“Half Yellow Face and White Swan went into the valley with Reno and had not got out when we left. White Swan was wounded in Reno’s valley fight. All six Crows were on Crows Nest at daylight June 25.”

“Statement of Goes Ahead.” Herbert Coffeen, *The Teepee Book, June 1916*, (Sheridan, Wyoming: Herbert Coffeen, June 1916). 57-58.

Finally, at the main fork of Reno, Custer gave orders to his command for the last time. It was plain that he was outnumbered, but he was fearless. One division of his troops under Reno was sent to attack the Indian camp from the upper end and Gen. Custer and his division was to attack from the lower end. Custer was brave, so it was no time for him to back out. He led his men to where he was repulsed and driven to where the Custer Monument now stands.

***Goes Ahead, “Later Supplemental,” The Arikara Narrative of Custer's Campaign against the Hostile Dakotas, June 1876*, edited by Orin Grant Libby, *North Dakota Historical Collections, Volume 6*, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismark, ND, 1920 p 157 – 160.**

Close to where Reno and Benteen later in the day were attacked by the Dakotas, on the ridge of hills above the river, the three Crow scouts were left behind and Custer's command went down the draw toward the lower ford on the run. Custer had told the Crow scouts to stay out of the fight and they went to the left along the ridge overlooking the river while he took his command to the right.

Then in accordance with orders Custer had given them about staying out of the fight, they rode back along the ridge and met the Arikara scouts and packmules. They then rode away around the point of the highest hill, and along the ridge. After riding all night they reached the mouth of the Little Bighorn by daylight. Here Terry met them. He asked about Custer and they told him Custer had been wiped out. He asked them four times.

“White Man Runs Him's Story of the Battle. A Crow scout's account of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.” As told to Col. Tim McCoy on the Custer Battlefield in 1919. Found in W. A. Graham, Colonel, *The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custerania*, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Stackpole Co., 1953), p 20 – 24.

Just after sun-down Mitch Boyer and an army officer with a long mustache and large nose [Captain Varnum] left the camp with me and started back for the look-out. I know this country well, so I acted as guide. We followed down the Lodge Pole trail, which was the regular trail from the Rosebud across to the Little Horn, and reached the look-out about two o'clock in the morning. Our horses were led into the pocket where they were hidden, and we lay down to wait for daylight. As soon as it became light enough to see, we could make out smoke from the Sioux camp down in the Little Horn Valley and could see some white horses on the other side of the Little Horn River. We also saw two Sioux about one mile and a half west moving down Davis Creek toward the soldiers' camp and six other Sioux to the northeast over on Tullock Fork.

“Statement of White Man Runs Him.” Herbert Coffeen, *The Teepee Book*, June 1916, (Sheridan, Wyoming: Herbert Coffeen, June 1916). 52-53.

"Toward sun-down we got away and rode through some sharp buttes where a good many Sioux fired at us. We killed one of them. We kept on and came to the Big Horn near the mouth of the Little Horn. It was raining and very dark and muddy. Part of Gibbon's command were coming up the east side of the river. We told them the camp was up the river, and that they were fighting hard. We told the scouts to come with us to the Crow camp to get fresh horses, so we could come back and join the command. We told them they would get killed if they went to the Sioux camp. They went with us and we traveled till we reached the Crow camp on Pryor Creek.

“White Man Runs Him and Curley's Battlefield Interview With General H.L. Scott: Two Crow scouts' account of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.” From Gen. H.L. Scott's interview with White Man Runs Him and Curley on the Little Bighorn Battlefield on August 24, 1919. Found in W. A. Graham, Colonel, *The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custerania*, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Stackpole Co., 1953), 14 – 18.

I know for sure that Custer went right to the river bank. I saw him go that far. The Sioux were right across the river. Then Custer fired. That was the first firing Custer did. If it wasn't for Mitch Boyer most likely I would be there with Custer buried, but Mitch Boyer told us to go back. 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."

“Curley’s Statement.” Herbert Coffeen, *The Teepee Book, June 1916*, (Sheridan, Wyoming: Herbert Coffeen, June 1916). 56.

What I am going to tell is just short. I don't know much about it, but I will tell you all I know. I was never where most of the soldiers were; I was always with Custer’s outfit. I knew the Chief with the long whiskers and I knew Custer's brother. I also knew the one who called the bugle.

We met the camp before ten o'clock in the morning. Just before we got to the camp, there was one band that went one way, and the other band went the other way. I don't know anything about that band.”

Curley’s interview with Major General Hugh L. Scott. Hugh L. Scott Papers. National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. “Joint Interview with White Man Runs Him and Curley by Major General Hugh L. Scott, U.S.A., Retired, August 1919.”

Curley: “We also met two groups of soldiers on the ridge just north of where Reno made his stand. We came back past the Arapahoe (note here that translation mistook Arikara for Arapahoe!) scouts but do not know what became of them afterwards. The Sioux did not follow Reno across the river at first. Their attention was turned to where some Crow and Arapahoe scouts were surrounded in the woods on the west side of the river. We stopped while they were doing this.”

“White Swan (Man-nah-shah),” Minnie Reed Williams, unpublished manuscript for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) histories of Montana, about 1939-1941. Minnie Reed Williams Collection, LBH College Archives.

“I was ten years old (1889) the one time I saw him. He was visiting my mother Yellow Medicine Flower. There was a family connection. My mother gave a feast in his honor. My mother with all Indian graciousness gave him special attention. Cutting his meat for him. Lifting his meat to him. Now and then putting a cup of coffee to his mouth. Due to and [sic] affliction it seemed...For some how he appeared different...For he was telling about soldiers, the Sioux Indians and a battle. Child like [sic] I was interested. My mother noticing my expression of awe, rushed me out doors to play with other children. Telling me at the same time, ‘Not to listen to older peoples talk.’ I knew then what White Swan was telling was to remain a secret.

“ About fifteen years ago a half heard [sic] story was vividly awakened when I heard his name. I wondered then if it was a myth...I once more became interested to learn the reason (of the secrecy) in all its details...For now the story truly becomes a Crow Indian legend.”

“White Swan meets Dr. Porter,” Richard Upton, ed., comp., intro., *The Battle of the Little Big Horn: Custer’s Last Fight Remembered by Participants at the Tenth Anniversary, June 25, 1886, and the Fiftieth Anniversary, June 25, 1926* (El Segundo, CA: Upton & Sons, 2006), 30.

While we (Dr. Porter and group of friends) were examining the place (the Reno-Benteen position) and wondering what each of us would have done under like circumstances, a Crow Indian rode up on his pony, and in a moment had recognized Dr. Porter.

“How! How!” he exclaimed at the same time, insisting on shaking hands with the latter. He bared his arm, showing a frightful wound and also three other places on his person where bullets had left their marks.

“Are you White Swan?” asked the doctor.

“How! How!” replied the Indian.

“Well, I declare,” remarked Dr. Porter, “What strange things sometimes happen. This Indian was shot all to pieces in the fight, and I remember that I dressed his wounds for him with little hope at the time of his recovery. I have not seen him since the day we were cooped up on the hill over yonder; and here he comes, ten years later, in perfect health, hearty and strong, to remind me of that little service, and to thank me in his [own] way for what I did.”

“*Recollections of a Famous Fight Told by White Swan thru an interpreter.* Herbert Coffeen, *The Teepee Book*, (Sheridan, Wyoming: Herbert Coffeen, November-December 1915, pages 26-29, NOTE: This interview was done in 1903 at the time of the Sheridan Fair. The interpreter was Spotted Horse.

He does not like to be questioned because it makes him hot when all the others were killed. He said he have mule and horse killed then and he got shot in a blood vein there and he got weak losing so much blood he said there was a fellow where they were shot there he was shooting another direction and a Sioux came on this side of him and he turned over and shot him and the Sioux shot him in this place (the hand) and he would rather have been killed right there than to lose the use of his hand. He got up that night about midnight and he could not hear. He said he didn't know when he was struck on the forehead and did not know when they got his gun. He says that they saw he didn't have any hair and that was the reason they didn't scalp him.

Interview of White Swan, 1894. Reverend and Mrs. James Gregor Burgess. Courtesy of National Park Service, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, the Walter Mason Camp Collection, "Interview with Burgess, J.S. White Swan's Story", LIBI 12966. Four of five pages of this interview are in the National Monument archives. The fifth page is in the Walter M. Camp Collection, BYU Library, Box 2, Folder 16, nd.

At sundown the mule train came in. The scouts were taken, and together they went to the hills, the Sioux after them. This was the 5 time they were surrounded. They dug a pit for White Swan, and over him they planted the flag. They said as long as that floated, they would not leave each other.

Plenty Coups, Crow Chief. *Plenty Coups: Chief of the Crows* by Frank B. Linderman published by the University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 1962. Pages 174-176.

White Swan had been so badly wounded on the Little Bighorn that the white soldiers had taken him away on a steamboat and Half-yellow-face, refusing to leave him, had gone too. When finally Half-yellow-face came back to us, I learned what he saw on the Little Bighorn...It was then that the Son-of-the-morning-star sent Half-yellow-face with that other chief (Reno)...It was Half-yellow-face and White Swan who led many of that other chief's men into a safe place among the bushes. And it was they who, when at last night came, showed these soldiers where they could creep away and cross the Little Bighorn to reach the chief who was on the hills with the rest of his men. Half-yellow-face and White Swan, who was badly shot, stayed in those bushes with the wounded white soldiers until The-other-one (Terry) came and relieved them all."

Pretty Shield, Crow medicine woman, testimony to Frank B. Linderman and published in 1932 as *Red Mother* and subsequently republished as *Pretty Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* in 1972 by Bison Books.

"This time the home-coming of our warriors was not a happy one. I saw my man, Goes-ahead, and felt glad; but when the men who had been to war told us that Half-yellow-face and White-swan were dead, my heart fell down to the ground. They were both good, brave men, and besides, Half-yellow-face was my uncle, my father's brother. The mourning was terrible to hear. The relatives of the two missing men gave away all their horses, and clothing, cutting themselves on their arms and legs and heads until they were bloody all over. But when my father began to mourn for his brother, Half-yellow-face, my man, Goes-ahead, stopped him. 'Wait four days,' he said, 'and then if your brother does not return I will mourn with you.'

Thomas H. Leforge. *Memoirs of White Crow Indian (Thomas H. Leforge)*. Told by Thomas B. Marquis with an introduction by Joe Medicine Crow and Herman J. Viola. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln. A Bison Book. 1974.

"I interpreted for Lieutenant Bradley when he interviewed Curly, several days after the Custer battle had occurred. He (Curly) was spoken of then as the 'sole survivor' of the disaster. But he himself did not lay claim to that kind of distinction. On the contrary, again and again during the long examination of him by Bradley, the young scout said, 'I was not in the fight.' When gazed upon and congratulated by visitors he declared, 'I did nothing wonderful; I was not in it.'...Romantic writers seized upon Curly as a subject suited for their fanciful literary purposes.

My three Crow scouts (Half Yellow Face, White Swan, and Curley) and myself set out the following morning (July 4) to find the tribal camp...Arriving opposite the mouth of Pryor Creek, we saw the Crow lodges across the south side of the Yellowstone...My three Crow companions had receptions like mine." Using July 4 as the date since the casualties were disembarked from the *Far West* on July 2, Leforge and the three arrived in the camp about the 7th or 8th.