The Electronic Reserve Collection is a service for UNCW students, faculty and staff. Access to the collection is by professor’s name or course number only.

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code), governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research". If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order, if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

Lazy White Bull, et al.
The battle of Rosebud Creek, June 17, 1876: Lazy White Bull, Minneconjou Lakota; Little Hawk, Northern Cheyenne; and Young Two Moon, Northern Cheyenne.
Pages 15-30 in “Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian views of the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877”,
edited by Jerome A. Greene

Published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Copyright © 1994 by the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Publishing Division of the University.
All rights reserved.
Chapter 2
The Battle of Rosebud Creek,
June 17, 1876
Lazy White Bull, Minneconjou Lakota; Little Hawk,
Northern Cheyenne; and Young Two Moon, Northern
Cheyenne

In the spring following the Cheyennes' battle with General
Crook's soldiers on Powder River, the Indians converged in the
Powder River–Yellowstone River region of present southeastern
Montana. Aware of the army's presence, they drew together for
protection and to follow age-old hunting traditions. By early
June, the tribes' movement toward the Little Big Horn was
underway. During the middle of that month, as General Crook
once more ventured north, the warriors did an unusual thing:
on June 17 they initiated an attack on Crook's column along the
upper reaches of Rosebud Creek. The battle lasted for most of
the day before the Lakota and Cheyenne warriors withdrew,
allowing the troops to turn south once more for reinforcements.
The attack prevented Crook from meeting Brigadier General
Alfred H. Terry's soldiers along the Yellowstone and thereby set
the stage for the Indian victory a week later on the Little Big
Horn.

The Rosebud battle was fiercely contested, involving as
many as fifteen hundred warriors and more than one thousand
soldiers. It was fought on the high, open terrain adjoining the
Rosebud and largely consisted of a series of charges and coun-
tercharges by either side in endeavoring to gain, retain, or
recover the optimum high points on the field. The Sioux and
Cheyennes together lost approximately eleven men killed and
five wounded in the encounter; the troops listed ten men killed
and twenty-one wounded.

The Indian recollections of Rosebud Creek offer examples
of the individual aspects of their mode of warfare while provid-
ing insights about how these participants prepared for combat
and how they viewed the battle and its meaning for their tribes.
The following account of the Rosebud battle was given by Lazy White Bull (later Joseph White Bull) to Stanley Vestal (Walter Stanley Campbell) about 1930. Lazy White Bull (1850–1947), a Minneconjou Lakota, was a nephew of Sitting Bull, the famous Hunkpapa leader who was prominent throughout the events of 1876. His recollections are excerpted from Vestal, Warpath: The True Story of the Fighting Sioux Told in a Biography of Chief Joseph White Bull (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934).

During May and June, Sitting Bull’s great camp was hunting on the Rosebud and the Little Big Horn, and all this time Sitting Bull kept scouts out. But for a long time they had nothing to report. By the middle of June, the game and the grazing on the Rosebud had become exhausted and the camps were moving back to the Little Big Horn looking for buffalo. On the evening of June 16, the tipis were pitched on Reno (Ash) Creek, between the Rosebud and the Little Big Horn. That night, Cheyenne scouts came in and reported the valley of the Rosebud black with soldiers. General George “Three Stars” Crook was coming from Fort Fetterman, Wyoming, with more than a thousand white soldiers and two hundred and sixty Indian Scouts—Crows, Shoshoni, Rees [Arikaras]—a force of more than thirteen hundred men.

Makes-Room was attending a meeting in the Cheyenne camp when the scouts came in. He hurried back to his own camp circle and spread the news. All the Sioux began to prepare for battle. They expected a hard fight.

White Bull put on a pair of dark blue woolen leggings decorated with broad stripes of blue-and-white beads, and beaded moccasins to match. Before and behind he hung a long red flannel breech-cloth reaching to his ankles, tucked under his belt over his regular loin-cloth. He put on a shirt, and over his right shoulder he hung the thong which supported the small rawhide hoop, to which was
attached four small leather pouches of medicine (earth of
different kinds), a buffalo tail, and an eagle feather. This
was his war-charm. It hung under his left arm. Around his
waist, like a kilt, he placed his folded black blanket and
belted it there with his cartridge-belt containing a hun-
dred cartridges. He borrowed a fine war-bonnet from his
brother-in-law, Bad Lake.

This bonnet had a long tail of eagle feathers reaching
to the ground. The feathers began at the crown of the head
and went straight down the back. There were no feathers
around the head on this bonnet. All the way down the tail
this bonnet was colored red and white alternately—seven
white feathers, then four red, and so on. These red feather-
ses commemorated wounds received in battle. A man who
wore such red feathers dared not tell a lie or he might be
wounded.

This bonnet had no protective power: White Bull
wore it for its beauty. If he were to be killed, he wished to
die in these fine war-clothes. Otherwise those who saw
him lying on the battlefield might say: "This was a poor
man. He must not have been a good warrior. See how
shabby he lies there." Besides, such fine war-clothes made
a man more courageous.

White Bull took his seventeen-shot repeating rifle,
which he had purchased from an Agency Indian at Fort
Bennett [along the Missouri River in Dakota Territory].
Then he went out and saddled a fast horse. He tied an
eagle feather in its forelock and tail and fastened an imita-
tion scalp made of woman's hair to his bridle-bit. Only
horses which had been used to ride down an enemy could
wear such a decoration. Then White Bull rode over to [his
uncle] Sitting Bull's tent where the warriors were gathered.

Almost a thousand warriors had assembled—Chey-
enne, Oglala, Minniconjou, Sans Arc, Brulé, Hunkpapa.
It was late at night when they set out. They rode until
nearly daybreak, then stopped, unsaddled, and let their
Lazy White Bull, Minneconjou Lakota, 1880s. Photograph by George W. Scott. Courtesy of the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

horses rest. At daybreak they saddled up and rode on until they came near a big hill. There they halted again and sent scouts forward to the top of this hill to look for the troops. When these scouts had traveled halfway to the hilltop,
Indian Government scouts appeared there, and firing was heard.

The whole war-party whipped up their horses and charged for the hill. There they found a Sioux wounded, and a horse killed. They rode over the hill and saw five Government scouts dashing downhill to the troops. They charged these five men, shooting all the time, and wounded one of them. Still they pressed on, following the five scouts, close to the soldiers.

The soldiers advanced, firing at the Indians. A Cheyenne had his horse shot under him. The Sioux who rode with him were all surrounded and killed. They got caught between two bodies of enemies. It was a hard fight.

White Bull was not much given to singing war-songs, but as he advanced into that fight he was inspired to sing a song composed on the spot:

*Friends, try your best.*
*I do not wish my father to be made ashamed.*
*Because he is a chief.*

There was a brave Cheyenne wearing a war-bonnet and red leggings who led the attack. White Bull kept trying to get in front of this brave man, but could not; the Cheyenne had the better horse. But as the Government scouts and the soldiers came charging back, White Bull stood his ground and the Cheyenne retreated past him. White Bull was out in front at last. The enemies kept coming, and in the lead dashed a brave Shoshoni [army scout]. He was riding a fast bald-faced sorrel with white stockings. His horse's tail was tied up in red flannel and a red flannel strip was tied about its neck. This Shoshoni had a cartridge-belt and a repeating rifle. He came straight for White Bull.

On came the Shoshoni, and White Bull sped to meet him. When he came near, the Shoshoni fired twice—but
missed. White Bull pumped two bullets into the right foreshoulder of the sorrel horse and dropped it. He ran the Shoshoni down and lamed him in the right leg, then wheeled away to join his comrades in retreat.

Afterward White Bull learned from the Crows that this Shoshoni was one of the bravest of their warriors. This Shoshoni was still living a few years ago: he may be alive today. This was considered one of the bravest of White Bull's many deeds, and, when President Coolidge visited the Black Hills and White Bull was chosen to make the address of welcome for the Indians, the Chief was pointed out as The-Man-Who-Lamed-the-Shoshoni.

It may be interesting to know White Bull's opinion of the various enemies he fought with: Says he: "The Rees are good fighters. The Flatheads fight well on foot with guns, but if you once get them to running, they sure do run. The Crows and the white soldiers are about the same at long-range shooting, but in hand-to-hand combat the Crows are more dangerous. But of all the enemies I have fought, the Shoshoni are the bravest and best warriors."

It was back and forth that day. All day long the Indians of both sides charged back and forth [on] horseback and not a few were killed on both sides. The troops lost nine men killed and twenty-one wounded. Of White Bull's immediate friends, Little Crow, Black Bird, Sitting Bear, and Little Wolf perished.

There were many thrilling rescues. White Bull's brother, One Bull, saved Yells-at-Daybreak (His-Voice-is Loudest-at-Daybreak, sometimes translated Rooster). White Bull himself saved Hawk Soldier after he was shot from his horse. He carried him back to his uncle. In another part of the fight a horse was shot and the Indian rider was pinned down. His leg was caught under the dead horse. White Bull ran forward and protected him until he could get his foot free and escape.

There was a Cheyenne in this fight named Sunrise.
He was painted yellow all over and wore a stuffed water-dog [salamander] tied in his hair for a war-charm. He was shot through the belly from behind and lay helpless. White Bull dismounted and ran forward under fire. He seized the Cheyenne by the wrists and dragged him back to safety. The Cheyennes still honor White Bull for saving this man. Sunrise died after they got him back to camp. Because of his war-charm some of the Sioux remember him as Water-Dog.

This was one of the hardest fights White Bull ever saw. It lasted all day, but when it was over “Three Stars” took his troops and hit the trail back to his base. The Sioux and Cheyennes rode home, leaving scouts behind to watch “Three Stars” movements.

Two days later the Sioux returned to the battlefield. They found the body of a government scout there. Some say the Indians dug up the bodies of the white soldiers buried there, but White Bull knows nothing of this.

There is one strange thing about the Three Stars’ battle. A certain Cheyenne rode into the fight, singing:

I do not wish to be an old man.
This day is mine to die.

That Cheyenne was killed in the fight. White Bull is puzzled to know how the Cheyenne knew he was to die that day. He says he never saw an Indian throw his life away deliberately in battle or commit suicide in a fight.

The Northern Cheyenne warrior, Little Hawk, was twenty-eight years old at the time of the Rosebud Creek battle. He furnished his reminiscences to George Bird Grinnell on September 5, 1908. They are in Notebook 348, Grinnell Collection, Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.

They [the Cheyennes] were camped down at big bend of Rosebud when he went to Brave Wolf and proposed that
Little Hawk, Northern Cheyenne, 1880s. Courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.
they should go to war. When they set out they came south from big bend through this country and went over on Pole Creek. As they were about to go down into the valley they discovered a lot of soldiers coming but soldiers did not see them. They turned about and came back. They came down Rosebud and found Cheyenne camp at mouth of Muddy. They reported soldiers on Pole Creek. A good many young men who were brave and strong and able to make a quick trip... started after night and travelled all next day going a little way and then stopping. Scouts sent ahead had discovered that soldiers had come as far as Tongue River and had stopped there. They went close to Tongue River and waited, having determined to make a night charge thinking that they could stampede the soldier horses. When night came and they thought soldiers were sleeping, they slipped up close and charged and began to shoot but the soldiers must have been sitting up with guns in their hands for a rain of bullets met them. They fought for a time but no one was killed on either side, so far as they knew. Then they left soldiers and came away and returned to their camp.\textsuperscript{2} This was in 1876.

When camp moved they went to where... [Thompson Creek] now is and then to Reno Creek. That night Little Hawk called four young men, and said to them let us go out and see if we can not get some horses from the white people. They saddled up and started. They went through the Wolf Mountains then went on, at length stopped to wait for day. At day they went on and struck through the hills and about noon reached the big bend of Rosebud... As they went down Rosebud they saw a big herd of [buffalo] bulls. Little Hawk told the young men that they would kill one and would roast some meat. He approached the bulls and shot one, and broke its back and it dragged itself down near the creek and they killed it and found close to it a nice spring. They began to skin the buffalo and one started a fire.
Before they had the meat roasted a big band of buffalo cows came in sight. They told Crooked Nose to stay and roast the meat while they went to look for a fatter animal. The men were Yellow Eagle . . . [,] Crooked Nose . . . [,] Little Shield . . . [,] White Bird . . . [and] Little Hawk . . . They looked back at Crooked Nose cooking meat and saw that he was motioning them from side to side for them to come back. They turned their horses and rode back without killing this fat cow. When they reached him, Crooked Nose said to them, "On that hill by those red buttes I saw two men looking over and after looking a little while they rode up in sight, each leading a horse. They rode out of sight toward us. I think they are coming in our direction right toward us." Little Hawk said, "Saddle up quick. I think those are Sioux. We will have some fun with them."

They saddled and rode up a little gulch. When they got up there a little way he [Little Hawk] stopped his horse and looked over and as he raised his head it seemed as if the whole earth were black with soldiers. He said to his friends, "They are soldiers," but he said it very low for the soldiers were so close that he was afraid they would hear him. He turned and got on his horse and Little Shield said, "The best thing we can do is to go back to where we were roasting meat. There is timber on the creek and there we can make a stand." But Little Hawk did not hear him say this and jumped on his horse and started and the others followed him. As he was riding, he lost his field glasses but he did not stop. He went down to Rosebud and into the brush and through it up the creek. He left a good many locks of his hair in the brush.

Keeping on up the Rosebud and so out of sight of troops who had not yet reached the river, they came to a big high butte about three miles above soldiers. They were not discovered. There they stopped and looked back. They could still see the soldiers coming down the hill with the
naked eye. If they had not killed the buffalo they would have kept on and ridden right into the soldiers. The buffalo bull saved their lives. Coming up the creek they did not lope. They just raced their horses fast as they could go.

When they left this round butte they rode on over the mountains toward the Little Big Horn. After they had crossed the mountains they rode along the foothills of the Wolf Mountains and just as day began to break they came to the camp which had moved just a little way down Reno Creek. When they got near camp they began to howl like wolves to notify them that something had been seen. Some early rising Sioux came out and met them and asked, "Who are you, Sioux or Cheyenne?" They said, "Cheyenne," and the Sioux turned and left them but notified the Cheyennes that some of their people were coming. Soon the whole camp was aroused. They got into camp just at good daylight. They supposed this was the big outfit of which Custer's command was a part. When they reached camp all the men began to catch their horses and to get ready. All painted themselves, put on their war bonnets, paraded about the camp two-by-two, and then struck out for the soldiers going straight through the hills.

About midday they reached the place where the soldiers were camped, just where they had first seen them. Many people charged, but one man who had the best horse was in the lead. [This was] Chief Comes In Sight. His horse's hind leg was broken before he reached the soldiers. The Cheyennes retreated toward the hills and left Chief Comes In Sight on foot. He was walking away and all the soldiers were shooting at him as hard as they could. His sister was with the party riding a gray horse. She looked down and saw her brother there and rushed down to meet her brother and he jumped behind her and she brought him off. Neither was hit. The soldiers made a charge and drove the Cheyennes back, but the Cheyennes charged, White Shield leading, and drove the soldiers.
They came near killing a whole company. They fought till late in evening and then stopped. Only one Cheyenne was killed in fight, . . . Thin Hair. He was shot through the bowels from in front backward.

Young Two Moon (John Two Moon) was the nephew of Chief Two Moon of the Northern Cheyennes. Born in 1855, Young Two Moon was twenty-one years old when his people fought Crook. His account of the Rosebud Battle was given to George Bird Grinnell on September 12, 1908. It is in Notebook 348, George Bird Grinnell Collection, Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.

The man who brought news into camp was Little Hawk. Camp was on Reno Creek. With some of the others he [Young Two Moon] rode about camp watching and listening—as if guards. Before anyone had come in, they were expecting something to happen and thought that they would be the first ones out. The first thing they heard was some one coming howling like a wolf. When they heard this they knew that someone was coming who had seen something. As soon as he heard it he rode toward the sound. When they reached Little Hawk, one of them asked, “What is it?” Little Hawk said, “Pretty near to the head of Rosebud where it bends to turn into the hills, as we were roasting meat we saw soldiers—I think there are many Indians with them too. They may come right down the Rosebud.” As soon as they could get ready, all the young men set out. John Two Moon came on with a party that struck Rosebud about the mouth of Thompson Creek. They got about two miles above this. They were headed off by the Cheyenne soldiers, who formed a line and would let them go no farther, because Little Hawk had expressed the opinion that the white soldiers were coming down the stream. They did not know where Little Hawk was but he had led a large party across through the Wolf Mountains.
There were about 200 men with Two Moon's party and one woman. They sent on ahead two Sioux and two Cheyennes. They were told if they found the troops to come back at once. After these four had been gone for some time the main body started after them.

Four Indians had been sent out for the troops as scouts on the east side of Rosebud. The four scouts sent out by Sioux and Cheyennes and those for the white troops saw each other. Scouts for troops were on the ridge but the four men for the Cheyennes and Sioux were down in the bottom. The four turned about. The scouts of the white soldiers turned about and rode back to the command. The Sioux and Cheyenne scouts rode zigzag as a sign that they had seen something and all the Indians in line down the creek charged up toward them. Before they came in sight of the soldiers this party could hear the guns and knew that they were fighting and kept on up the stream. Soon they heard the guns to the right and, leaving the bottom, crossed over the hills to the river again. They reached the top of the hills looking down into the Rosebud Valley and could see the soldiers chasing the Indians back into the hills. The soldiers were pretty strong. They could see the horses of the Indians falling and being wounded as they climbed the hills. They did not stop long on the divide but charged down on the soldiers, who stopped their pursuit and fell back.

Now the party with Little Hawk turned their horses and charged so that there was a big body of men charging down on the soldiers. Chief Comes In Sight's sister charged down with the men. On the side from which they charged there was a little ridge running down and when they reached this Indians all dismounted and it hid them. Beyond was a nice level piece of ground. The Indians did not stay there. They mounted and started down toward the hills. Those who were out on the level ground, they had to fight though there was little cover. After Indians got back
out of sight again Two Moon looked over and saw four cavalry horses starting toward the hill. Two Moon and Black Coyote started down after them and behind them two Cheyennes [and] two Sioux started. When they came in sight charging down, the soldiers made a charge to drive them back. Soldiers came near overtaking them and were shooting at them fast. Then Two Moon went too far to one side and did not get the horses. The soldiers charged him and he went a little too far so that the soldiers almost caught them. Then they turned back.

There was now fighting all along the line. The company of soldiers which were charging straight down stopped near the river. The six men who had charged when they saw they could do nothing, turned and went to join another body of Indians that were coming in above them. This body was chiefly of Cheyennes. They did not later go into the fight. Two men here did brave things. White Shield and a Sioux. They made a charge on the troops and Indians followed. When charge began the troops were dismounted, but when the charge was made they all mounted and retreated towards the main body of troops. The soldiers did not run far but wheeled and fell in line and fired a volley and then mounted and ran. Here White Shield killed a man, counted coup on and ran over him. The Sioux did the same.

On top of a little ridge the soldiers dismounted again. They tried to hold back Indians but after an officer was shot the body of Indians coming against them was great and troops retreated. Here a soldier could not mount his horse and White Shield rode between him and his horse to knock the reins out of his hand and free them. He killed and counted coup on this man who had a bugle. When Indians left the ridge from which troops had been driven they had to cross a steep gulch to get upon the next flat. On the flat a white soldier fell off or was wounded and lost his horse. A Cheyenne named Scabby Island [Eyelid?] rode
up to the soldier and tried to strike him with his whip. The
soldier caught whip and pulled Indian off his horse. This
soldier and this Indian got away unhurt.

The [army] Indian scouts . . . now made a charge and
Sioux and Cheyennes ran. They now retreated across the
deep gulch just crossed before. After crossing this the
Cheyennes and Sioux wheeled and fired once and then
turned and ran again. The number of soldiers was great.
Now the soldiers made a strong charge and then Indians
divided, some going down the ridge and some up. Two
Moon left the ridge and when he got on the flat his horse
got out of wind and there were the soldiers close behind
him and coming fast. The Cheyennes who were up above
could see a person there alone whose horse had given out.

Two Moon thought that this was his last day. He had to
dismount, leave his horse and run off on foot. The bullets
were flying pretty thick and were knocking up the dirt all
about him. He saw before him a man advancing on a
buckskin horse and he thought he was going to have some
help, but the bullets flew so thick that the man turned and
rode away. Again he saw a man coming toward him riding a
spotted horse. He recognized the person, Young Black
Bird (now White Shield). White Shield ran up to his side
and told Two Moon to jump on behind him and he did so.
So White Shield saved his life that day. They did not go
very far, but farther than he could have gone afoot, when
that horse began to lose its wind and give out. Soon they
saw another man coming leading a horse that he had
captured from the Indian scouts of the troops. It was
Contrary Belly. Meantime two Sioux had dashed up to the
two men but when they got close one of them said they are
Cheyennes and they rode away. Then Contrary Belly came
up and Two Moon jumped on the led horse and rode away.
When they reached the main body of Sioux and Chey-
ennes they stopped and made a stand. The soldiers were
still coming but there were so many Indians they stood
them off. Here the fight stopped. The Cheyennes and Sioux stayed there a little while and then went away and left soldiers. Many men were wounded and many horses killed and wounded so that many Indians were on foot. After this fight Young Blackbird’s name was changed to White Shield.