

The Murder of Chief Crazy Horse

*What Capt. H. R. Lemly Saw Personally of This
Most Treacherous Deed Against a Great Indian Leader.*

By E. A. BRININSTOOL

(All photographs used in this article are from Mr. Brininstool's private collection)

THE greatest fighting chief of the Sioux nation, after the practical retirement of Red Cloud, following the Wagon Box fight, 1867, was unquestionably Crazy Horse.* Although a young man, even at the time of his treacherous murder, he had won his spurs in the defeat of Reynolds on March 17, 1876, on Powder River and of the (practically) defeat of Crook in the Rosebud fight of June 17th following, to say nothing of the leading part he played in the annihilation of Custer's command two weeks later on the Little Big Horn. After that, his reputation among his own people was secure.

The author through the Nebraska Historical Society, has already published in pamphlet form the story of the murder of Chief Crazy Horse as related by Gen. Jesse M. Lee, at old Camp Robinson in September, 1877. Crazy Horse had come in and surrendered about the middle of the previous May, at Red Cloud Agency, with about 140 lodges of his people, numbering by actual count, around one thousand men, women and children, most of them being Ogalalla Sioux.

But Crazy Horse did not surrender "because he wanted to." Far from it! He was by no means a subdued warrior. He was actually starved out, and really came in to make such terms with the military authorities as would bring rest and peace to his people, who were always his first consideration, and who had scarcely known defeat under his able and valiant leadership.

* The author regrets that no photograph of Crazy Horse is available. He steadfastly refused to allow any white man to photograph him.

The author engaged in correspondence with Capt. H. R. Lemly, U. S. A. retired, in 1925. He has since passed away. This correspondence, together with Capt. Lemly's signed account of the murder of Chief Crazy Horse, follows:

ARMY AND NAVY CLUB,

Washington, D. C., June 17, 1925.

"E. A. Brininstool, Esq.,

"Los Angeles, Cal.

"Dear Sir:—

"I take pleasure in trying to answer your letter of the 6th inst.

"Crazy Horse was approximately 40 years old when killed."

"Lieut. Philo Clark, whom I knew well, had nothing to do with Crazy Horse's incarceration and his intended transfer to Fort Marion, Florida, unless through his influence with Gen. Crook or with Gen. Sheridan, who said, 'The only good Indian is a dead one.'

"The three-fourths breed daughter of Louis Richard, a half-breed interpreter at Red Cloud Agency, and married to a squaw, had eloped to Crazy Horse. The agent asked the Indian Bureau in Washington to forcibly restore her to her father. Telegraphic orders were sent by the War Department to Gen. Sheridan in Chicago; by him to Gen. Crook at Fort Laramie, and by him to Gen. Bradley at Camp Robinson. Both girl and Crazy Horse refused such restoration, and when Gen. Crook wired he would take her, Crazy Horse grimly replied, 'Tell the Gray Fox (Crook) to try it!'

"Gen. Crook ordered Major J. W. Mason from Fort Laramie to Red Cloud



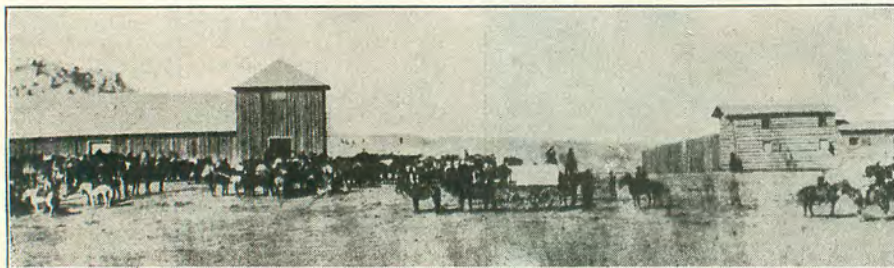
Touch-the-Clouds, so called because of his great height (7 feet), close friend and companion of Crazy Horse who was present when the great chief passed away.

Agency by night marches. At daybreak we arrived at Crazy Horse's village, seven troops of cavalry; but Crazy Horse had fled with his people during the night to Spotted Tail Agency, where Capt. J. M. Lee was acting Indian Agent. Lee persuaded Crazy Horse to return to Red Cloud Agency with him, for a talk with Gen. Bradley, and gave Crazy Horse a verbal safe conduct.

"Meanwhile, Gen. Bradley had received orders from Gen. Sheridan, through Gen. Crook, to confine Crazy Horse and send him to Fort Marion, where Geronimo (Apache) was confined.

"I was to take him at midnight, with my troop (E) of Cavalry, rapidly to Fort Laramie, thence by coach to Cheyenne and by train to Florida.

"When Crazy Horse saw the cell, he attempted to escape, but was bayoneted in the bowels by a member of the guard at the door. He fell to the ground in convulsions. The wound bled internally. Some thirty to fifty mounted and dismounted Indians had formed a semi-circle in front of the guard-house. When Crazy Horse fell, they produced hidden carbines from under their blankets, cocked them and cornered all of us. Firing was



Old "Red Cloud Agency". This famous Indian Agency was located about half way between the present city of Crawford, Nebraska, and Fort Robinson, now a remount station. Photo taken during a ration-day distribution.

averted by the quick action of Baptiste Pourier, the interpreter, and Crazy Horse was carried to the Adjutant's office, where he died about 12:15 a. m., after singing the Indian death song.

"Capt. Lee saw him during the evening, but only the contract surgeon, Dr. McGillycuddy, Touch-the-Clouds (Indian friend of Crazy Horse) Baptiste and myself were present when he died.

"Next day his body was taken by Indians to Red Cloud Agency. Tom-toms were kept beating night and day for a week, and we even feared an attack on Camp Robinson. Crazy Horse's body was kept several days before it was removed to Spotted Tail Agency. I do not know where it was buried. At that time the Indians put their dead on scaffolds, not in the ground.

"Crazy Horse was a lithe, slender Indian of medium or more height, weighing perhaps 155 to 165 pounds. I never saw him, except before his death, clad in a red blanket, and later, lying upon it on the floor in the Adjutant's office before his death.

"Louis Richard's daughter, who fled to Crazy Horse, was said to be very pretty. Crazy Horse must have been good-looking to have attracted her. Because of the Custer battle he had great prestige with his

own followers, with Red Cloud's Ogalallas and Spotted Tail's Brules.

"In a letter I wrote to the New York Sun, and which Mr. E. P. Mitchell, editor, wrote me was the best piece of border correspondence he had read in a long time, I sent a somewhat different account, September 6th, the day following Crazy Horse's death. I was only a second lieutenant, and I was afraid of getting into trouble if I betrayed my identity. In this letter I said Major J. W. Mason instead of Captain (later general) Henry.

"Crazy Horse was seized by Little-Big-Man, Agency Indian Police, whom he badly cut with a keen sharp knife drawn from the folds of his blanket, and the attempt was made to make the Indians believe that Crazy Horse *accidentally stabbed himself*, in the scuffle, I think a soldier of the guard inflicted the wound. Gen. Crook had left only two days before on the 4th. I think he did not like to be around when he did not exercise direct and immediate command; but he must have been at Fort Laramie, not at Omaha.

"Gen. Bradley did all he could to have the order of incarceration revoked, wiring Gen. Crook at Laramie about the *safe-conduct* given by Capt. Lee; but I think

Gen. Sheridan in Chicago was at fault, or the matter may not have been properly understood by him.

"Sitting Bull was similarly killed by treacherous Indians. In this letter I find that I said that Crazy Horse was to be taken to Spotted Tail Agency, 50 miles north, where his people were, and this was no doubt done. In my letter he died about 12:15 a. m., Sept. 6, 1877.

"Crazy Horse, it seems, had been enlisted by the United States as a Sioux scout. There were both friendly (enlisted) and hostile Sioux present, and many dismounted Indians as well at the killing.

"Hoping this may serve your purpose, I am

"Very truly yours,
(Signed) "H. R. LEMLY,"
Major U. S. A. (retired).

Captain Lemly's story follows:

"EARLY in the spring of 1876, when the thermometer registered many degrees below zero, Gen. George Crook, with a command composed of troops from the Second and Third regiments of Cavalry, under Col. J. J. Reynolds, surprised at daybreak, and destroyed, the village of the Ogalalla Sioux Chief, Crazy Horse.

"The latter was one of the so-called 'hostiles' who had refused to remain at Red Cloud Agency subsisting upon the bounty of the government. Instead, they led a nomadic existence, remote from the settlements and army posts, and hunted the buffalo, which animal was still abundant in the regions of the Powder and Yellowstone Rivers.

"Crazy Horse's people suffered incredible hardships after the destruction of their village, and only the gallant re-capture of their herd of ponies prevented their utter annihilation. For this ill-luck, Gen. Reynolds, a distinguished soldier of the Civil War, endured the humiliation of a court-martial. The weather encountered was so tempestuous and bitterly cold that, after partial success, the troops returned to Fort Laramie.

"Preparations were then made on a larger scale, and three columns were put in motion as early as possible in May, from widely divergent posts; Fort Abraham Lincoln, on the Missouri River, under Gen. Alfred H. Terry; Fort Ellis on the west, in Montana, under Gen. John Gibbon, and Fort Fetterman in Wyoming under Gen. George Crook. The last-mentioned command was attacked by the Indians under Crazy Horse on the 17th of June, in the valley of the Rosebud River, during which engagement, which lasted several hours, the troops suffered a loss of nine men killed and one officer, (Capt. Guy V. Henry) and twenty men wounded. Although the Indians retired from the field, the next morning Gen. Crook returned to his permanent camp and asked for reinforcements.*

"Eight days later Gen. George A. Custer, lieutenant-colonel of the 7th Cavalry, and commanding his regiment, attacked the

* Just why Crook retreated and called for reinforcements when he had over 1100 men in his command, while Custer's command numbered less than 800, has never been explained. *Author.*



The noted Brule Sioux chief, Spotted Tail, with his wife and daughter. Spotted Tail Agency was named for him.

same Indians in their village upon the Little Big Horn river, and the five troops under his immediate command suffered utter annihilation. The remaining seven troops under Major Marcus A. Reno, were in imminent danger of the same fate, when relieved by Gen. Gibbon, who had been personally joined by Gen. Terry. They rescued fifty-two wounded men and buried 261 dead, all officers, soldiers or scouts and packers.

"In these several engagements Crazy Horse was the fighting man and Sitting Bull the medicine man of the discontented Sioux. After the massacre on the Little Big Horn, many of the Indians returned to Spotted Tail and Red Cloud Agencies, but Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, accompanied by their most devoted followers, evaded the troops, crossed the Yellowstone River and escaped into Canada,** where they remained several years. Finally, after considerable negotiation, and when assured of immunity by the United States government, they rejoined their tribes, Crazy Horse going to Red Cloud Agency in Nebraska.

"At this time the resident interpreter at this Agency was a half-breed descendant of a French voyageur named Louis Richard, who had a beautiful daughter, and of her Crazy Horse speedily became enamored. He was a tall, lithe Indian, still young, with the prestige of his military attainments surrounding him; and apparently the love was returned. At any rate, after sending several ponies to her father—after the Indian fashion of buy-and-sell marriage—Crazy Horse carried off the young woman to his tepee.

"**B**UT the interpreter entertained other views for his daughter, and caused the Agent to demand her return. Crazy Horse, it was said, referred the matter to the girl herself, who, in turn, defied her father's messengers, and announced her desire and intention to remain with her Indian husband.

"At this juncture, Gen. Crook, who commanded the Department of the Platte, was appealed to, and an officer of the army, stationed at Camp Robinson, near Red Cloud Agency, was sent to Crazy Horse with the threat that he would have to suffer the consequences if he did not return the girl to her father. To this menace Crazy Horse made the laconic reply: "Tell Gray Fox (Gen. Crook) to come and take her!"

"Immediately the telegraphic instruments began to click, and a battalion of the Third Cavalry, under Major Julius H. Mason, was ordered to proceed from the nearest contiguous post (Fort Laramie) to Red Cloud Agency, which was protected by a half regiment of infantry stationed at Camp Robinson. The column of cavalry was directed to so time its arrival, after a night march, that it could surround the village of Crazy Horse at daybreak.

"All went well. The 'Gray Fox' had seemed to plan admirably in sending for the remoter troops and providing for a night approach; but when they arrived

upon the bluffs supposed to overlook the village, there were no tepees in sight. The bird had flown! After a short halt and an examination of the trail, the troops returned to Camp Robinson.

"Again the telegraphic instruments got busy when it was discovered that Crazy Horse and his village had gone to Spotted Tail Agency, some fifty miles away, and claimed the hospitality of the old chief of that name, at the head of the Brule Sioux.

"**A**T that time Capt. Jesse M. Lee of 9th Infantry (since Major-General, now deceased), stationed at the adjacent post of Camp Robinson, was acting Indian Agent, and finally persuaded Crazy Horse to accompany him to Camp Robinson to talk over the matter with Gen. Luther P. Bradley, a distinguished old officer of the Civil War, in command of the post, and of what was then known as the 'District of the Black Hills.' No more honorable officers ever lived than Gen. Bradley and Captain Lee, and the part they played, inadvertently or by compulsion, that day was no doubt revolting in the extreme. Somebody 'high up' had blundered; but orders had to be obeyed!

"I happened to be crossing the parade ground when General Bradley, walking

upon the veranda of his quarters, observing that the approaching ambulance containing Capt. Lee and Crazy Horse was followed by mounted Indians, hurriedly called, and directed me to post Troop E of the Third Cavalry, in the vicinity of and surrounding the guardhouse. At the same time he gave instructions to Capt. Kennington, 14th Infantry, the officer of the day.

"When the ambulance halted in front of Gen. Bradley's office, Capt. Lee accompanied by Crazy Horse and Touch-the-Clouds, an extremely tall Indian as his name implies, dismounted and entered the building; but shortly after, Capt. Lee appeared and crossed the parade ground to Gen. Bradley's quarters, from which he presently emerged and returned to the commandant's office. After a few minutes delay I saw Capt. Kennington and the Indian (Crazy Horse) proceed to and enter the guardhouse. As they did so, the guard, which had formed at sight of the officer of the day, by the latter's orders, faced the door of the building.

"When Crazy Horse entered, I observed for the first time that he was accompanied by Little-Big-Man. This Indian, so named because of his small stature, double joints and great strength, was known to the



Little-Big-Man, who grappled with Crazy Horse and was badly cut by the latter in the struggle. Said to have been a paid spy in the employ of the Agency.

** Capt. Lemly is in error here. Crazy Horse did not accompany Sitting Bull into Canada.—Author.

officers as a paid spy in the employ of the Agency.

"Thus far Crazy Horse had proceeded apparently unconscious of danger. *Against his protest* Capt. Lee had been directed to inform him that it was too late for a council, and that he must spend the night in charge of the guard, *and that no hair of his head would be harmed*. But when Crazy Horse saw a narrow and barred cell in front, fearing that it was for himself, he immediately made a rush for the door!

"Instantly he was grappled by Little-Big-Man, who attempted to force him to the floor; but whipping out a long and slender knife from the folds of his red blanket, Crazy Horse drew its keen edge across the wrist of his assailant and cut it to the bone.

"CAPT. KENNINGTON drew his sword, but with one bound Crazy Horse gained the door of the building, and with another leap fell upon the ground outside, pierced through the groin and abdomen by the bayonet of the guard. Here he lay and writhed in convulsions, but uttered no sound.

"Pick that Indian up and carry him to the guard-room!" shouted Capt. Kennington. Four members of the guard dropped their rifles and started to obey, when, as if with a single click, thirty carbines were cocked and aimed at us by as many mounted Indians who had formed a semi-circle about the entrance to the guard-house.

"For God's sake, Captain, stop!" exclaimed 'Big Bat', the post interpreter, 'or we are all dead men!'

"I was within the semi-circle and my own men mounted outside, posted according to my instructions, but literally unavailable at the moment, as were the members of the guard, and we were taken unawares.

"For a few seconds our lives hung in the balance, when Big Bat, taking advantage of the ominous silence, assured the Indians that Crazy Horse was ill, and proposed taking him to the Council Chamber at the other end of the building, where he could be attended by the surgeon. To this they assented, for the bayonet thrust had been unseen; and presently the carbines were lowered and the dangerous hammers released.

"At the same time Crazy Horse was gently conveyed to the Adjutant's office and placed upon his extended blanket on the floor. Touch-the-Clouds and Big Bat accompanied him, and shortly after, Dr. McGillicuddy, the post surgeon, appeared. Later I was given special charge of the wounded chief, but not until I had seen his followers dash wildly from the garrison, firing their carbines in the air and yelling like fiends, as they galloped off to their camps, from which the sound of tom-toms and of war-dancing soon warned us of a possible night attack.

"Had the Sioux present been fully cognizant of the cause and nature of Crazy Horse's malady, trouble could scarcely have been averted; but when they learned of his death it was too late.

"For several hours Crazy Horse re-

mained unconscious. The hemorrhage was internal, and gradually sapped away his strength. While the impression was sought (unofficially) to be conveyed that the wound was self-inflicted by Crazy Horse himself in his struggle with Little-Big-Man, the conversation by members of the guard, which I overheard, convinced me that, although I did not actually see the stroke, *Crazy Horse was killed by a thrust from a bayonet*.



Lieut. Philo Clark, 3d Cavalry, noted sign-talker, author of "The Indian Sign Language", Crook's "right bower" during the Crazy Horse episode. (Seated) Little Hawk, a sub-chief under Crazy Horse, regarded as next to him as a fighting chief.

"When he recovered consciousness he sent for Capt. Lee, whom he acquitted of all blame, saying, 'This would not have happened if I had listened to you.'

"Already it had been planned to imprison the chief in Fort Marion, at St. Augustine, Florida. He was to have been taken in an ambulance, at midnight, with a troop of cavalry for an escort, to Fort Laramie, thence by the Deadwood coach to Cheyenne, and by trains east and south.

"Death kindly intervened. As the fatal moment approached, consciousness returned, and the dying chief, supporting himself upon his elbow, for the first time gave vent to his feelings. Touch-the-Clouds was visibly affected. Big Bat interpreted.

"I was not hostile to the white man," said Crazy Horse. 'Occasionally my young men would attack a party of the Crows or Arickarees and take their ponies, but just as often they were the assailants. We had buffaloes for food and their hides for clothing, and we preferred the chase to a life of idleness and the bickerings and jealousies, as well as the frequent periods of starvation at the Agencies.

"But the 'Gray Fox' (Crook) came out in the snow and bitter cold and destroyed my village. All of us would have perished of exposure and hunger had we not recaptured our ponies.

"Then Long Hair (Custer) came in the same way. They say we massacred him, *but he would have massacred us had we not defended ourselves and fought to the death*. Our first impulse was to escape with our squaws and papposes, but we were so hemmed in that we had to fight. The government would not let me alone. Finally I came here to Red Cloud Agency. Yet I was not permitted to remain quiet. I took a half-breed Indian wife, after the Indian fashion. She came to me willingly, and I sent her father ponies in exchange. He refused them and demanded her return. I told her to go if she wished, but she refused. She said she loved me and would remain with me.

"Again the Gray Fox sent soldiers to surround me and my village; but I was tired of fighting. All I wanted was to be let alone, so I anticipated their coming and marched all night to Spotted Tail Agency while the troops were approaching the site of my camp. Touch-the-Clouds knows how I settled at Spotted Tail Agency, and asked that chief and his Agent to let me live there in peace. The Agent told me I must first talk with the big white chief of the Black Hills. Under his care I came here unarmed, but instead of talking they tried to confine me, and when I made an effort to escape, a soldier ran his bayonet into me.

"I have spoken!"

"And then, in a weak and tremulous voice, he broke into the weird and now-famous death-song of the Sioux. Instantly there were two answering calls from beyond the line of pickets, and Big Bat told me they were from Crazy Horse's old father and mother, who begged to see their dying son. I had no authority to admit them, and resisted their appeal, piteous as it was, until Crazy Horse fell back with the death-gurgle in his throat. The end had come!

"When the little old couple, gray and wrinkled as only old Indians can become, were finally allowed to enter, they bent over and crooned to the prostrate form of their dead son, and fondled it as if he had been a broken doll and they strangely-withered children or pigmies.

"The next day Crazy Horse's body was given to his people for burial. The beating of tom-toms and the war-dancing continued for several nights, but finally it was discontinued.

"Some years later Sitting Bull met a similar fate at the hands of the Indian constabulary.

(Signed) "H. R. LEMLY."

EDITOR'S NOTE

Two more authoritative articles by Mr. Brininstool dealing with historic personalities of the "Wild West of the 70's" will appear in the near future. One tells of hair-raising and breath-taking adventures of Capt. James B. Gillett with the Texas Rangers, including his solitary pursuit into Old Mexico, where he kidnaped a notorious bandit and brought him back to the bar of justice in the United States. The other reveals views on the logic of the Indian war question by one of America's great soldiers, General John Gibbon.