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Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting, in compliance with a Senate resolution of February 23, 1875, a report of the expedition to the Black Hills, under command of Bvt. Maj. Gen. George A. Custer.

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S. Exec. Doc. No. 32, 43rd Cong., 2nd Sess. (1875)

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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING,

In compliance with a Senate resolution of February 23, 1875, a report of the expedition to the Black Hills, under command of Bvt. Maj. Gen. George A. Custer.

FEBRUARY 26, 1875.—Ordered to lie on the table and be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
February 25, 1875.

The Secretary of War has the honor to transmit to the United States Senate, in compliance with resolution of the 23d instant, report of the late expedition to the Black Hills, under the command of Bvt. Maj. Gen. George A. Custer.

WM. W. BELKNAP,
Secretary of War.

[Telegram.]

HEADQUARTERS BLACK HILLS EXPEDITION,
Eight and a half miles southeast of Harney's Peak, August 2,
(Via Fort Laramie, Wyo., 8, 1874.)

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT-GENERAL,
Department of Dakota, Saint Paul, Minn.:

My last dispatch was dated July 15, and sent from Prospect Valley, Dakota, longitude 103 degrees and 46 minutes, latitude 45 degrees and 29 minutes. Two of my Indian scouts left as bearers of the dispatch as soon as their departure could be concealed by the darkness. After leaving that point this expedition moved in a southwesterly direction until it reached the valley of the Little Missouri River, up which we moved twenty-one miles. Finding this valley almost destitute of grazing along our line of march, I ordered the water-kegs filled and a supply of wood placed in the wagons, and left the valley in search of a better camp-ground. During our passage up the valley of the Little Missouri we had entered and were about to leave the Territory of Montana. Our course was nearly due south. After further march of about nine miles, we arrived before sundown at a point capable of furnishing us good grazing and water for our animals, having marched over thirty miles since breaking camp in the morning. From this point to the valley of the Belle Fourche we found the country generally barren and uninhabited, save in a few isolated places. We reached the Belle Fourche on the

evening of the 18th of July, encamping where good grass, wood, and water were abundant, and at a point a short distance above that marked fifteen (15) on Reynolds's map, just west of the line separating Dakota from Wyoming. The following day was spent in camp.

On the 20th we crossed the Belle Fourche and began, as it were, skirmishing with the Black Hills. We began by feeling our way carefully along the outlying ranges of hills, seeking a weak point through which we might take our way to the interior. We continued from the time we ascended from the valley of the Belle Fourche to move through a very superior country, covered with the best of grazing and abundance of timber, principally pine, poplar, and several varieties of oak. As we advanced, the country skirting the Black Hills to the southward became each day more beautiful. On the evening of the 22d, we halted and encamped east of and within four miles of the Cave Inyan Kara. Desiring to aside (ascend?) that peak the following day, it being the highest on the western range of the Black Hills, I did not move camp the following day, but, taking a small party with me, proceeded to the highest point of this prominent landmark, whose height is given as 6,600 feet. The day was not favorable for obtaining distant views, but I decided on the following morning to move due east and attempt the passage of the hills. We experienced considerable delay from fallen timber which lay in our pathway. With this exception, and a very little digging, rendered necessary in descending into a valley, the pioneers prepared the way for the train, and we reached camp by 2 o'clock, having marched eleven miles. We here found grass, water, and wood of the best quality, and in great abundance. On the following day we resumed our march up this valley, which I had explored the preceding evening, and which led us by an easy ascent almost southeast.

After marching nearly twelve miles, we encamped at an early hour in the same valley. This valley, in one respect, presented the most wonderful as well as beautiful aspect. Its equal I have never seen; and such, too, was the testimony of all who beheld it. In no private or public park have I ever seen such a profuse display of flowers. Every step of our march that day was amid flowers of the most exquisite colors and perfume. So luxuriant in growth were they that men plucked them without dismounting from the saddle. Some belonged to new or unclassified species. It was a strange sight to glance back at the advancing columns of cavalry, and behold the men with beautiful bouquets in their hands, while the head-gear of the horses was decorated with wreaths of flowers fit to crown a queen of May. Deeming it a most fitting appellation, I named this Floral Valley. General Forsyth, at one of our halting-places, plucked seventeen beautiful flowers, belonging to different varieties, and within a space of twenty feet square. The same evening, while seated at the mess-table, one of the officers called attention to the carpet of flowers strewn under our feet, and it was suggested that it be determined how many different flowers could be plucked without leaving our seat at dinner-table. Seven beautiful varieties were thus gathered. Professor Donaldson, the botanist of the expedition, estimated the number of flowers in bloom in Floral Valley at fifty, while an equal number of varieties had bloomed, or were yet to bloom. The number of trees, shrubs, and grasses was estimated at twenty-five, making the total flora of the valley embrace one hundred and twenty-five species. Through this beautiful valley meanders a stream of crystal water so cold as to render ice undesirable even at noonday. The temperature of two of the many springs found flowing into it was taken, and ascertained to be forty-four and forty-four and one-half de-

gress respectively. The next morning, although loath to leave so enchanting a locality, we continued to ascend this valley until gradually, almost imperceptibly, we discovered that we were on the crest of the western ridge of the Black Hills, and instead of being among barren peaks, as might be supposed, we found ourselves wending our way through a little park, whose natural beauty may well bear comparison with the loveliest portions of Central Park. Favored as we had been in having Floral Valley for our roadway to the crest of the Black Hills, we were scarcely less fortunate in the valley which seemed to rise to meet us in the interior slope. The rippling stream of clear, cold water, the counterpart of that we had ascended the day before, flowed at our feet and pointed out the way before us, while along its banks grew beautiful flowers, surpassed but little in beauty and profusion by their sisters who had greeted us the day before. After advancing down this valley about fourteen miles, our course being almost southeast, we encamped in the midst of grazing whose only fault, if any, was the great luxuriance. Having preceded the main column, as usual, with an escort of two companies of cavalry (E and C) and Lieutenant Wallace's detachment of scouts, I came upon an Indian camp-fire still burning, and which, with other indications, showed that a small party of Indians had encamped there the previous night, and had evidently left that morning in ignorance of our close proximity. Believing they would not move far, and that a collision might take place at any time unless a friendly understanding was arrived at, I sent my head scout, "Bloody Knife," and twenty of his braves to advance a few miles and reconnoiter the valley. This party had been gone but a few minutes when two of Bloody Knife's young men came galloping back and informed me that they had discovered five Indian lodges a few miles down the valley, and that Bloody Knife, as directed, had concealed his party in a wooded ravine where they awaited further orders. Taking a company with me, which was afterward reinforced by the remainder of the scouts, and Colonel Hart's company, I proceeded to the ravine where Bloody Knife and his party lay concealed, and from the crest beyond obtained a full view of the five Indian lodges, about which a considerable number of ponies were grazing. I was enabled to place my command still nearer to the lodges undiscovered. I then dispatched a guard, the interpreter, with a flag of truce, accompanied by two of our Sioux scouts, to acquaint the occupants of the lodge that we were friendly disposed and desired to communicate with them. To prevent either treachery or flight on their part, I galloped the remaining portion of my advance and surrounded the lodges. This was accomplished almost before they were aware of our presence. I then entered the little village and shook hands with the occupants, assuring them, through the interpreter, that they had no cause to fear, as we were not there to molest them. I invited them to visit our camp, and promised presents of flour, sugar, and coffee to all who would accept. This invitation was accepted. At the same time, I entered into an agreement with the leading men they should encamp with us a few days and give us such information concerning the country as we might desire, in return for which service I was to reward them with rations. With this understanding, I left them. The entire party numbered twenty-seven. Later in the afternoon, four of the men, including the chief, "One Stab," visited our camp and desired the promised rations, saying their entire party would move up and join us the following morning, as agreed upon. I ordered presents of sugar, coffee, and bacon to be given them, and to relieve them of their pretended anxiety for the safety of their village during the

night, I ordered a party of fifteen of my command to return with them and protect them during the night. But from their great disinclination to wait a few minutes, till the party could saddle up, and from the fact that two of the four had already slipped away, I was of the opinion that they were not acting in good faith. In this I was confirmed, when the two remaining ones set off at a gallop in the direction of their village. I sent a party of our scouts to overtake them and request them to return. Not complying with this request, I sent a second party with orders to repeat the request, and if not complied with, to take hold of the bridles of their ponies and lead them back, but to offer no violence. When overtaken by our scouts, one of the two Indians seized the musket of one of the scouts and endeavored to wrest it from him. Failing in this he released his hold, after the scout became dismounted in the struggle, and set off as fast as his pony could carry him, but not before the musket of the scout was discharged. From blood discovered afterward, it was very evident that either the Indian or his pony was wounded. I hope that neither was seriously hurt, although the Indians have their own bad faith as the sole ground for the collision. "One Stab," the chief, was brought back to camp. The scouts galloped down the valley to the site of the village, when it was discovered that the entire party had packed up their lodges and fled, and the visit of the four Indians to our camp was not only to obtain their rations promised them in return for future services, but to cover the flight of the lodges. I have effected arrangements by which the chief One Stab will be with us as guide three days longer, when he will take his departure and rejoin his band. He claims to belong to both Red Cloud's and Spotted Tail's agencies, but has been to neither for a long time. He has recently returned from the hostile camp on Powder River, and represents that the Indians lost 10 killed, in their fights with the Bozeman exploring party. The creek which led us down into the interior of the Black Hills is bordered by high bluffs, on the crests of which are located prominent walls of solid rock, presenting here and there the appearance of castles constructed of masonry. From their marked resemblance, I named this stream Castle Creek. The direction of Castle Creek having commenced to lead us more to the northeast than we were prepared to go, and the valley having become narrow and broken, I left this water-course and ascended the valley of a small tributary, which again gave us a southeasterly course. After a march of fourteen miles, encamped on a small creek furnishing us an abundance of water and grass. The direction of this creek was nearly east. On the 30th, moved in the continuation of our previous course, and through a fine open country covered with excellent grazing. After a march of over ten miles, we encamped early in the day about five miles from the western base of Harney's Peak—finding water and grass and wood abundant, with springs of clear cold water running through camp. On the following day the command remained in camp, except the exploring parties sent out in all directions. With a small party I proceeded to Harney's Peak, and after great difficulty made the ascent to its crest. We found this to be the highest point in the Black Hills. From the highest point we obtained a view of Bear Butte, in the north part of plains to the east, far beyond the Cheyenne River. Our party did not reach camp till near 1 o'clock that night, but we were amply repaid for our labor by the magnificence of the views obtained. While on the highest point, we drank the health of the veteran out of compliment to whom the peak was named. On the 1st of August we moved camp a few miles, simply to obtain fresh grass, still keeping near the base of the hills to the east

of us. This a. m. I dispatched two companies, under Colonel Hart, in a southeasterly direction, to extend our exploration with the South Fork of the Cheyenne River. To-morrow morning at 5 o'clock I will set out with five companies of cavalry and endeavor to reach the same stream in a southwesterly direction from Harney's Peak. Reynolds, the scout who is to carry this dispatch to Fort Laramie, will go with us as far as we go in that direction, when he sets out alone to reach his destination, traveling mainly by night. The country through which we have passed since leaving the Belle Fourche River has been generally open and extremely fertile. The main portion of that passed over since entering the unexplored portion of the Black Hills consists of beautiful parks and valleys, through which flows a stream of clear, cold water, perfectly free from alkali, while bounding these parks or valley is invariably found unlimited supplies of timber, much of it capable of being made into good lumber. In no portion of the United States, not excepting the famous blue-grass region of Kentucky, have I ever seen grazing superior to that found growing wild in this hitherto unknown region. I know of no portion of our country where nature has done so much to prepare homes for husbandmen, and left so little for the latter to do, as here. The open and timbered spaces are so divided that a partly-prepared farm of almost any dimensions, of an acre and upward, can be found here. Not only is the land cleared and timbered, both for fuel and building, conveniently located, with streams of pure water flowing through its length and breadth, but nature oftentimes seems to have gone further and placed beautiful shrubbery and evergreens in the most desirable locations for building-sites, while on Harney's Peak I could contrast the bright-green verdure of these lovely parks with the sunburned and dried yellow herbage to be seen on the outer plains. Everything indicates an abundance of moisture within the space inclosed by the Black Hills. The soil is that of a rich garden, and composed of a dark mold of exceedingly fine grain. We have found the country in many places covered with wild raspberries, both the black and red varieties. Yesterday and to-day I have feasted on the latter. It is no unusual sight to see hundreds of soldiers gathering wild berries. Nowhere in the States have I tasted cultivated raspberries of equal flavor to those found growing wild here, nor have I ever seen them as large or in as great profusion as I have seen hundreds of acres of them here. Wild strawberries, wild currants, gooseberries, two varieties of pure berries, and wild cherries are also found in great profusion and of exceeding pure quality. Cattle could winter in these valleys without other food or shelter than that to be obtained from running at large. As there are scientists accompanying the expedition who are examining into the mineral resources of this region, the result of whose researches will accompany my detailed report, I omit all present reference to that portion of our explorations until the return of the expedition, except to state, what will appear in any event in the public prints, (that gold has been found at several places, and it is the belief of those who are giving their attention to this subject that it will be found in paying quantities.) I have upon my table forty or fifty small particles of pure gold, in size averaging that of a small pin-head, and most of it obtained to-day from one panful of earth. As we have never remained longer at our camp than one day, it will be readily understood that there is no opportunity to make a satisfactory examination in regard to deposits of valuable minerals. Veins of lead and strong indications of the existence of silver have been found. Until further examination is made regarding the richness of the gold, no opinion should be formed.

Veins of what the geologists term gold-bearing quartz crop out on almost every hillside. All existing geological or geographical maps of this region have been found incorrect. This will not seem surprising when it is remembered that both have been compiled by guess-work and without entering the country attempted to be represented. The health of the command continues excellent. I will begin my northward march in four days from this date. I do not expect to arrive at Fort Lincoln until the 31st of August.

G. A. CUSTER,
Bvt. Maj. Gen. U. S. A., Commanding Expedition.

Postscript, 10 30 p. m., August 3.—I left our main camp near Harney's Peak at 6 o'clock this morning with five companies of cavalry, and, after a march in a southerly direction of forty-five miles, reached the south fork of Cheyenne River, at the mouth of a creek flowing from the north and emptying into the Cheyenne midway between the mouths of Hot and Horsehead Creeks. From this point Reynolds, the scout sets out in one hour with this dispatch for Fort Laramie. I reached here at 9 p. m., and will proceed to Harney's Peak by a different route tomorrow morning. The country between here and Harney's Peak is generally open and rolling, and, excepting the southeastern portion, covered with excellent grass.

G. A. CUSTER,
Brevet Major-General, Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF DAKOTA,
Saint Paul, August 11, 1874.

Official copy respectfully forwarded to headquarters Military Division of the Missouri for the information of the Lieutenant-General, commanding.

ALFRED H. TERRY,
Brigadier-General, Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSOURI,
Chicago, August 15, 1874.

Respectfully forwarded for the information of the General of the Army.

P. H. SHERIDAN,
Lieutenant-General, Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY,
Washington, August 19, 1874.

Respectfully forwarded to the Secretary of War, inviting his perusal.
W. T. SHERMAN,
General.

HEADQUARTERS BLACK HILLS EXPEDITION,
Bear Butte, Dak., August 15, (via Bismarck.)

My last dispatch was written on the 2d and 3d instant, and sent from the south fork of the Cheyenne, from a point on the latter nearest to Fort Laramie. On the morning of the 4th instant I began my return march to our main camp, near Harney's Peak, arriving there by a different route on the 6th. On the morning of the 7th the expedition began its march northward, Bear Butte being our next objective point.

We advanced without serious obstacle until within ten or twelve miles of Bear Butte, when we found our further progress barred by a high range of impassable hills. We attempted to effect a passage through some one of the many valleys whose water-courses ran directly through the hills in the desired direction, but in every instance we were led into deep, broken cañons, impassable even to horsemen.

Through one of these I made my way on foot, and from a high point near its mouth obtained a view of the plains outside. Retracing my steps, I placed the command in camp in a fine valley, in which it had halted, and devoted the remainder of the day to a further search for a practicable route through the hills. The result decided me to follow down a water-course, which led us first toward the south and afterward toward the east. This stream proved to be Elk Creek, the valley of which, as well as the stream itself, proved to be at least equal in beauty and extent to any passed through during our march. We camped twice on this stream, and as far as we proceeded down its course we had a most excellent road; but finding that, like nearly all other streams leaving the hills, its course would take us into a cañon which could be barely made practicable for our wagons, I searched for and discovered a narrower gap in the rocky wall which forms the northern boundary of the valley, and which was conveniently large to allow our wagons to pass through. A march of an hour up a gradual ascent, and through a pine forest, brought us to a beautiful park containing thousands of acres, and from which we obtained a fine view, in the distance, of our old acquaintance—the plains. Here we pitched our tents for the last time in the Black Hills; nearly every one being loath to leave a region which had been found so delightful in almost every respect. Behind us the grass and foliage were clothed in green of the freshness of May. In front of us, as we cast our eyes over the plains below, we saw nothing but a comparatively parched, dried surface, the sun-burnt pasturage of which offered a most uninviting prospect both to horse and rider, when remembering the rich abundance we were leaving behind us. A march of twenty-six miles, gradually bearing northward, brought us to the base of Bear Butte, at which point I concluded to remain one day before beginning our return march. I propose to return by a different, although, perhaps, not shorter, route than that adopted in coming to the Black Hills. I am induced to make this change in order to embrace a larger extent of unexplored country within the limits of our explorations, and particularly to enable us to locate as much as possible of that portion of the Little Missouri of which nothing is now known. I expect the expedition to reach Fort Lincoln on the 31st of August. The health of the command has been, and is, most excellent. This expedition entered the Black Hills from the west side, penetrated through the eastern and most southern ranges, explored the major portions of the interior, and passed out the most eastern ranges which form the boundary of the Black Hills. From the fact that in all our principal marches through the Black Hills we have taken, without serious obstacle, a heavily-laden train of over one hundred wagons, it may be inferred that the Black Hills do not constitute the impenetrable region heretofore represented.

In entering the Black Hills from any direction, the most serious, if not the only obstacles, were encountered at once, near the outer base. This probably accounts for the mystery which has so long existed regarding the character of the interior. Exploring parties have contented themselves with marching around the exterior base, and, from the forbidding aspect of the hills as viewed at a distance, inferred that an advance toward the interior would only encounter increased obstacles. In re-

gard to the character of the country inclosed by the Black Hills, I can only repeat what I have stated in previous dispatches.

No portion of the United States can boast of a richer or better pasturage, purer water, the natural temperature of which in mid-summer, as it flows from the earth, is but twelve degrees above the freezing-point, and of greater advantages generally to the farmer or stock-raiser than are to be found in the Black Hills. Building-stone of the best quality is to be found in inexhaustible quantities. Wood for fuel and lumber sufficient for all time to come. Rains are frequent, with no evidence in the country of either drought or freshets. The season, perhaps, is too short and the nights too cool for corn, but I believe all other grain could be produced here in wonderful abundance. Wheat would particularly yield largely. There is no doubt as to the existence of various minerals throughout the hills, as this subject has received especial attention of experts who accompany the expedition, and will be reported upon in detail. I will only mention the fact that iron and plumbago have been found, and beds of gypsum of apparently inexhaustible extent.

I referred in a former dispatch to the discovery of gold. Subsequent examinations at numerous points confirm and strengthen the fact of the existence of gold in the Black Hills. On some of the water-courses almost every panful of earth produced gold in small, yet paying, quantities. Our brief halts and rapid marching prevented anything but a very hasty examination of the country in this respect; but in one place, and the only one within my knowledge where so great a depth was reached, a hole was dug eight (8) feet in depth. The miners report that they found gold among the roots of the grass, and, from that point to the lowest point reached, gold was found in paying quantities. It has not required an expert to find gold in the Black Hills, as men without former experience in mining have discovered it at an expense of but little time or labor. As an evidence of the rich pasturage to be found in this region, I can state the fact that my beef-herd, after marching upward of six hundred (600) miles, is in better condition than when I started, being now as fat as is consistent with marching condition. The same may be said of the mules of the wagon-train. The horses of the command are in good working-condition. I have never seen as many deer as in the Black Hills. Elk and bear have also been killed. We have had no collision with hostile Indians.

G. A. CUSTER,

Brevet Major-General, Commanding Expedition.

To ASSISTANT ADJUTANT-GENERAL,

Department of Dakota, Saint Paul.

[Indorsements.]

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF DAKOTA,

Saint Paul, Minn., August 22, 1874.

Official copy respectfully forwarded to headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, for the information of the Lieutenant-General, commanding.

ALFRED H. TERRY,

Brig. d'er-General, U. S. A., Commanding.

By O. D. GREENE,

Assistant Adjutant-General.

HEADQUARTERS MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSOURI,
Chicago, August 25, 1874.

Respectfully forwarded for the information of the General of the Army.
P. H. SHERIDAN,
Lieutenant-General, Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY,
Washington, August 27, 1874.

Respectfully forwarded to the Adjutant-General.

By command of General Sherman and in his absence:

JNO. M. BACON,
Colonel and Aid-de-Camp.

WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
Washington, February 25, 1875.

Official copies:

E. D. TOWNSEND,
Adjutant-General.

S. Ex. 32—2