

# A BAD DAY

## Being the whole truthful account of why that great American Hero Colonel Custer done gone and lost the battle of the LITTLE BIG HORN

### THE FORT

The Master Sergeant has knocked on the door, been bidden enter and now stands to attention.

He says, 'Ya thinkin' o' havin' a shave this here mornin', Sir?'

Custer ruminates for a moment and asks, 'What do you think? Trim o' the beard, bit off the tache? What you think?'

The Master Sergeant also ruminates then says, 'See here Colonel, there's a battle a comin' up. Best ta look ya best, ya think?'

Custer walks to the mirror, squares up his shoulders, juts out his chin and says, 'Yup, a trim it'll be but first my letter to the President. Send in the Adjutant, will you, so's I can dictate my words.'

The Master Sergeant says, 'Got ta remind ya, sir, the Adjutant's on the sick on account he got a bit o' his scalp knocked off last week in that there skirmish up the gulch. The Doc says as how the hair should grow back but the ear's a gonner an' he's a having to lie up a few days more.'

'Damn! Yes I remember now. Anyone around havin' the facility of a copperplate handwriting style and an' knowledge o' spellin' an' such? Never was one for spellin' a word the right way round when I could mangle it any other an', ya know, my punctuation's alus a bit wayward.'

'Well, Sir, there's this new, green behind the ears Lootenant, all sparklin' fresh out o' West Point and rarin' to take your dictating and such. I'll send him in?'

'What's he like, Master Sergeant?'

The Master Sergeant, who ruminates often, ruminates again and says, 'Well, Sir, let me put it this ol' way. At the moment I see him sortin' out the grammatical sooner an' easier than I see him sortin' out the Indians. Also he don't seem to sit a horse like a born to be Seventh Cavalry man should. But be that...'

'Got the picture, sure got the picture. More brains than arsy brawn. Well we'll give him a try and get him to tag along later so he sees how I get the Seventh to deal with the Plains Indian. Send him in. Warn the barber to be ready.'

Colonel Custer, never one to miss an opportunity to brush up his credentials with his superiors, the press or any passing photographer has taken to writing up his victories over various tribes of the Great Plains. That's the area he now operates in and he writes to all and sundry, including the President Ulysses Simpson Grant. The letters are sometimes written in advance of the victories and sometimes afterwards and sometimes both.

The Lieutenant is in awe of the Colonel's reputaton although he has, as yet, not been alone with him or, indeed, been introduced. He clutches his writing equipment and tries to calm his nerves then knocks on the door.

'Enter,' shouts the Colonel and the Lieutenant goes in.

Custer rises to shake his hand but before he can do so the Lieutenant blurts out, 'It's an honour and a privilege to meet you, Colonel Custard.'

Simultaneously to these words the Colonel closes on him to shake his hand. The Lieutenant holds his writing materials in the required hand so he lets loose these things which crash to the floor. His hand is shaken with vice like severity. The Lieutenant almost shrieks, 'Sir Custer, sorry, mortifyingly sorry.' and, standing quaveringly to attention says, 'General Custer, Sir, Colonel Sir my most humble apologies...'

The Colonel seats himself down and speaks while the Lieutenant picks up his materials..

'Lootenant you are not the first to make the mistake you have and I dare say you will not be the last. A custard is a quivering mass of messy yellow stuff. DO I STRIKE YOU AS A QUIVERING MESS OF YELLOW STUFF?'

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'DEFINITELY NOT SIR! MOST DEFINITLY NOT COLONEL....CUSTER...SIR!'

Without knocking the Master Sergeant rushes in, 'Everything all right, Sir?'

'The Lootenant and I are just about to write a letter to the President of the United States of America.'

'That's the ticket, Sir. Go to it.' and the Master Sergeant goes out.

The Lieutenant is bidden to be seated at one end of the table and sits arranging his paper, blotting paper, pen and ink bottle around him. He sits bolt upright thanking his lucky stars that the ink bottle was not in his hand but in his pocket.

Custer begins, 'Dear Mister President, comma, new line, I write to you on account I'm havin' a battle this here afternoon with a bunch of uppity Indians I've decided to bring into line an' they're the Lacoata tribe an' the North Shayanne tribe an' the Awrapahoo an' you can put there a full stop while I think out my next sentence. Just read back to me so I know you've got it all right so far. I ain't too sure how them Indians spell their tribal names.'

The Lieutenant clears his throat and speaks, 'Dear Mr. – I have used the usual abbreviation of capital M small r followed by full stop, of course, sir, - then have done as you suggested and gone down a line to continue....'

There is a knock at the door and the Master Sergeant enters, comes to attention, salutes and says, 'The scouts are back, Sir, and report the Indians are gathering together in a threatening formation.'

Custer says, 'I'll be out pronto. Tell my Second in Command to get the men saddled up. Dismiss. Lootenant carry on.'

'I write to you because there will be a battle this afternoon colon the Lakota comma North Cheyenne comma and Arapaho tribes refuse to accept the instructions given to them semi colon I have comma therefore comma decided that force is the only way of ensuring they obey the instructions you have issued comma earlier comma from Washington full stop. That's it, Sir.'

Custer frowns, leans forward and asks, 'Did I say all that?'

'Yes, Sir! I just, naturally, this being the actual President of the Unite States you are addressing, tidied things up a bit.'

'Ya seem to have put a mighty lot of commas in there. And some other things I ain't heard about before.'

'What were they, Sir?'

'A sem I colon, was it, and another thing called a colon? Now I reckon I know what a colon is...'

Just then there is a knock on the door and the Master Sergeant comes in, salutes and announces that, 'The barber's all lathered up an' awaiting your instructions to commence shaving, Sir.'

Custer says, 'Just hold him off a minute. Tell me, Sergeant, do you know what a colon is?'

'Do I know what a colon is? You bet'cha I know what a colon is, Sir. Every Friday pay day night I gets on the wrong side o' too much liquor an' ma colon screeches at me you done drunk too much again an' it rumbles on all night an' frets me ta distraction.'

The Lieutenant interjects, 'Sergeant, you are mixing up a medical term with a grammatical term. A colon in medicine is a part of the body while in grammar it is a useful device within a sentence for the introduction of something that follows such as a quotation or a list. In this case the names of the Indian tribes now out there ready to give battle.'

A silence descends on the room.

'A sem I colon?' Custer asks.

The Master Sergeant muses that, 'Maybe a sem I colon is one a youngster has before he grows up. Like a little bitty one?'

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‘Now let’s just stop there,’ orders Colonel Custer, ‘You, Sergeant, let the barber know I’ll be ready soon an’ the Second in Command to get the troops on the slow move. I’ll catch ‘em up shortly. An’ you, Lootenant get the rest o’ this here letter done right quick. I’m behind hand in my tactical planning.’

The Sergeant leaves, the Lieutenant dips his pen in the ink and Custer proceeds, ‘I got two hundred an’ fifty officers and men all saddle up an’ riding in to position an’ I have every confidence that I an’ they will see off them blasted uppity Indians an’ that I’ll be reporting another victory for Colonel Custer, the Seventh Cavalry, the leadership of this great nation of ours that now is vested in the person of your good self Sir an’ all our women folk an’ children can sleep easy at night on account the Seventh done done its job again under my command an’ I’d like to think you’ll give consideration to my promotion to a Brigadeership right soon because if it don’t come I think the press that are real good friends of mine on account I keep them informed of all my victories will want to know why I’m being overlooked an’ my regards to your good wife an’ God save America and its excellent President I remain your faithful servant an’ I’m off now Lootenant an’ pull all this together an’ I’ll put my signature on the bottom of this blank piece of paper an’ you just fill in the top bit like I said an’ just put in the full stops an’ commas an’ go easy with the sem I colons and them other things you got all that an’ blast it’ll be too late for a shave so I’m off.’

Too late, for the Colonel has exited the room with the furious energy of a Great Plains tornado, the Lieutenant says, ‘Your sword, Sir!’

## **THE BATTLE FIELD**

Sitting Bull, who masterminded the Battle of the Little Big Horn, and Crazy Horse, who lead the warriors on the day, ride easy on their ponies. They circle the mound of bodies where Custer made his last stand.

Sitting Bull, ‘Well, I must say old chap, here’s a turn up for the book and no mistake.’

Crazy Horse, ‘I’ve had a count done and, in total, two hundred and fifty dead. Evens the score up a little don’t you think?’

Sitting Bull, ‘Absolutely! We’ll have to get the chaps together and give them a rousing speech or two.’

Crazy Horse, ‘Spot on. Good thinking.’

Sitting Bull, ‘You do realise of course, CH, that this dramatic, totally unexpected and mightily humiliating defeat for them will have consequences for us?’

Crazy Horse, ‘Yes, we’ll be running away from now on. They’ll take their revenge big time. Strategically a bad move by us but Custer did hand it to us on a plate, you’ll admit. What was he thinking about? Still, tactically on the day, you have to say, great fun.’

Sitting Bull, ‘And, also, two hundred and fifty dead means the price of scalps will take a knock. So, there’s Colon el Custer stuck on the top of the pile. What’s that he’s got in his hand? Looks like a bit of paper. And a pen in the other hand! No sword to be seen. Whatever next? Get one of the chaps to climb up and get that paper for us.’

The paper is retrieved, the pen as well, and one of the more erudite young braves translates for the two chiefs who decide it would be a hoot to send it off to its intended recipient, The President of the Unite States of America,

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Ulysses Simpson Grant, ex Civil war hero, friend of the Red Man and not the self -publicist type such as Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer.

The letter, written in a shaky hand, begins, *'Dear Mr President...*

## THE WHITE HOUSE

*'Ulysses, my Dear, you look mightily annoyed about something. Whatever is the matter?'*

*'Mrs President, I always knew that man was trouble. Not enough thought, too much action of the precipitated mode. First I received a letter boasting about his victory in a battle yet to be fought and now this tawdry scrap of paper.'*

*'May I, Dear?'*

The letter gets handed over and she reads,

*'Dear Mr President,*

*I do humbly beg your pardon: I seem to have lost the Battle of the Little Big Horn big time; against them pesky Indians. Sorry about: that fact, the tribes still being on the lose; the letter I prematurely set to you this morning. I didn't pay enough thought to the tactics being consumed as I was with; having a shave, writing letters; getting tied in knots by all the grammatical stuff. Enough.*

*Again I apologise.*

*Hope the rest of your Presidential time goes well.*

*My regards to you Lady Wife,*

*PS Forgot to take my sword! Lordy and me a soldier!!.. Somehow picked up a pen instead!!!:!. No damned use against the Red Man; thus proving the pen is not mightier than **the** sword!!!!!!*

*PPS Whoever that damned Lootenant is please get him demoted---: he done distracted me with all his colons and such*

*Yours George Simpson Custer.....*

*.....  
...*

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‘Tawdry indeed, Ulysses. His spelling and grammar go off horribly. All those exclamation marks, semi colons and things. Did he never have any schooling? And I find red ink totally out of place in the circumstances of an awful defeat. Surely black is the more appropriate? I am so against red.’

The President says, ‘Mrs President, have you not realised the situation he was in? A pen, yes he had such. But no ink. Surrounded by thousands of ferocious and deadly Indians and his end nigh I will, at least, commend his resourcefulness in that he used his own blood.....’

‘What!? This red stuff is his very own gore? Ulysses Simpson Grant you utter bounder! You know and you did not tell me. You know I cannot.....’

The First Lady proceeds to faint.

‘....stand the sight of blood. Sorry my dear utterly forgot. Hey there, smelling salts.’

She comes round and says, ‘A bad day all round, Mr. President.’

‘Oh, come on Julia, don’t be like that. I’ll grant I should have mentioned the fact of his use of his own blood. But look on the bright side. Somehow my staff will spin the story to the press and in a week or two, that idiot Custer will be a national hero. Last man to fall; brave beyond words, fighting like a man not skulking in dark canyons waiting to ambush like the Red Man. Yes, he’ll be a hero.’

‘And, Ulysses, the BAD DAY will be forgotten.’

‘Yes Mrs. President, it will.’

‘I am, though, going to buy myself a very expensive new dress to make up for the your tawdry manners in the matter of Custer’s tawdry letter. You hear me!’

**THE END**

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