

“A Day Long to be Remembered”

By Gerry Schultz





Reverse of the MOH awarded to Thompson



Medal of Honor in case displayed at the High Plains Western Heritage Center, Spearfish, SD

On Cover:

1. Broken Arrow illustration by Charles M. Russell. "Firewater and forked tongues" by M.I. McCreight 1947

2. Wagon wheels stacked up from the flood, photo by James P. Horner, taken June 14, 2007. My co-worker James and I headed west to inspect our tower sites. The location of the site is west of the Cottonwood Creek, Hathaway, MT. This creek had flooded eight days earlier. As we drove around the bend, the creek valley came into view and since we were atop the draw, our view of the valley was clear. We slowed down and surveyed the damage done by the flood. As we drove down the valley it became apparent the extent of the damming and the flooding that took place, for there was a debris water line, high up the banks of the valley. We stopped and James got out taking some pictures of the devastation. I stood there wondering what this valley must have looked like when the flood took place. Suddenly something caught my eye. Way up the bank at the top of the water line, I noticed some papers. The papers seemed out of place, so I crawled up through the debris to the point where the papers laid. I observed that they appeared to be some kind of documents, multiple pages stapled together. The papers were a copy of a hand typed manuscript which had suffered water damage but were intact. The papers had dried out in the spring sun. I crawled down the bank and sat down and began to read the document. As I read this story to myself, James took a picture of me sitting and reading. On the coversheet was the title, "Custer's Last Fight, The Experience of a Private Soldier in the Custer Massacre" by Peter Thompson.

Before me unfolded the most fascinating story I have ever read. I could not put the story down. The more I read, the more I needed to keep going. As the Battle of the Little Big Horn took place before me, I was transformed. I listened to the words of Peter Thompson and I understood him, and I understood the Battle, for I was there. By Gerry Schultz. http://www.polfdesign.com/Thompson.html#anchor_52

3. Peter Thompson, pictures throughout his life.

Pre Army life, Sunday school teacher

Early rancher, 1886-1928, ranch on the Little Missouri River near Alzada, Montana.

Meeting with Historian Walter Camp 1909, on grounds of the battlefield.

During the 50th Anniversary of the Battle, 1926

Approx. age 76

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Outline of events

1. Early morning June 26th. Company H, south end of Reno Defensive Hill.
2. Warriors moved up ravine (latter called Water Carriers Ravine).
3. LT Gibson losing men and in need of reinforcements sends Private McDermott to Benteen.
4. Benteen located in the area of the pack train hardtack barricade position of Co A. receives message.
5. Benteen sends six men. (Privates Peter Thompson, Tim (John) Jordan, James Bennett, John McGuire, Alfred Whittaker, and Sgt Daniel Kanipe all of Company C) to take the crest of the hill. Thompson saw the river below the hill as he charged the crest.
6. Thompson, Meador and Bennett all wounded at crest.
7. Meador is KIA, Thompson shot in the hand and arm, and Bennett shot in the spine.
8. Benteen gathers eleven or twelve men to charge the ravine to clear it out. This is considered Benteen's first charge. It is successful. The hill is held and the ravine is cleared.
9. Thompson makes way to hospital area and is dealt with by Dr. Porter.
10. Thompson looks for anyone he knows among the wounded and finds Bennett, who asks for water. "This was on the 26th day of June, a day long to be remembered"
11. Thompson sees the crest of the hill is still held and gathers two canteens and kettle and heads for water.
12. Crest of the hill Thompson is stopped and questioned. Sgt refused to allow Thompson to go and told "He will never make it back alive".
13. A sling is made for wounded hand and Thompson goes anyway for he could not fight (wounded right hand).
14. Thompson makes way down ravine and gathers water.
15. Thompson returns to hospital area with water and an uproar for want for water erupts by the wounded.
16. Benteen hears the uproar and asks for volunteers to go for water. First organized water party goes for water.
17. Madden is wounded in knee and left at the river during first organized water party.
18. Benteen arranges for sharp shooters to provide cover fire for the water party: Geiger, Mechlin, Voit and Windolph.
19. Thompson makes his second trip for water and finds Madden in pool of blood. Thompson in which effort receives a head wound (three inch furrow) on right side of skull.
20. Warriors amass south end of Company H. Benteen goes for reinforcements and Company M is sent. During this episode Pvt Tanner is wounded. This is Benteen's Second Charge.
21. Thompson meets Pvt Tanner and makes third trip for water.
22. Upon returning Thompson finds Tanner has been moved to the hospital.
23. Firing continues till about three o'clock and begins to subside.
24. Thompson makes fourth trip for water.
25. As this long to be remembered day was drawing to a close.
26. Medal of Honor awarded.

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“This was on the 26th day of June, a day long to be remembered by all who took an active part, in fact a day never to be forgotten.”¹, wrote Peter Thompson. From 1875 to 1880 Thompson served in Company C of the 7th Cavalry, United States Army. During the days of June 25 and 26, 1876 one of the epic battles of the west took place, The Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Following the battle, Thompson with fellow wounded soldiers were evacuated from the battlefield and transported back to Fort Abraham Lincoln. As Thompson’s wounds healed, he began to write his memories of events that took place during the battle. Eventually he would put his words into a narrative entitled, **“Custer’s Last Fight, The Experience of a Private Soldier in the Custer Massacre”**².

Within the title is the words “the experience”. Thompson wrote his narrative to tell his personal experience of the battle and was not intended to be a historical document of the battle.

The following details the events shown in the outline. The statements are from accounts of survivors. The outline/timeline is drawn from and laid out from Peter Thompson’s narrative.

1. Early morning June 26th. Company H, south end of Reno Defensive Hill.

Pvt. Charles Windolph wrote, “My company, H, under Benteen, held the south side of the hill. On this side, a deep draw headed, running to the west and to the river.”³ (Water Carriers Ravine)

Says Company H’s men were behind a horseshoe facing south and also facing [west] toward the river.⁴

2. Warriors moved up ravine (Water Carriers Ravine).

Pvt. Charles Windolph wrote, “Up this the Indians swarmed, and ours was the hardest position to hold. For a while that night everything was quiet. No one was supposed to sleep, but now and then a man would topple off, in spite of everything. But before daylight, the attack commenced again, and nobody slept after that.”⁵

¹ Pvt. Peter Thompson, “CUSTER’S LAST FIGHT”, BELLE FOURCHE BEE, published weekly February 19 through April 9, 1914. Transcribed by Scott Nelson - scottnelson@gmail.com - <http://pie.midco.net/treasuredude/index.html> [http://pie.midco.net/treasuredude/Peter Thompson Narrative.pdf](http://pie.midco.net/treasuredude/Peter_Thompson_Narrative.pdf) , p.

² “Custer’s Last Fight, The Experience of a Private Soldier in the Custer Massacre” By Peter Thompson. Copy in possession of Gerry Schultz.

³ Pvt. Charles Windolph, Sunshine Magazine, Sept. 1930

⁴ Charles Windolph comments on the Little Big Horn Fight in Walter Camp’s notes (BYU, B5, F3)

⁵ Pvt. Charles Windolph, Sunshine Magazine, Sept. 1930

3. LT Gibson losing men and in need of reinforcements sends Private McDermott to Benteen.

LT Gibson said, "We were losing men rapidly in killed and wounded. The Indians saw this and grew bolder from time to time until they got within twenty-five feet of the right of my line. I had held this hill in obedience to Colonel Benteen's orders until my troop was so reduced in numbers as to make my evacuation of it almost necessary. ... Just as I had decided to send a messenger to Colonel Benteen, Private McDermott spoke to me and asked if I would like him to carry a message to the Colonel. I hastily pointed out the danger of his going, but he again expressed his willingness to go. So he carried my message to Colonel Benteen."⁶

4. Benteen located in the area of the pack train hardtack barricade position of Co A. receives message.

Lt Gibson, "So he carried my message to Colonel Benteen that I must have men and ammunition at once. McDermott miraculously got there and back without a scratch. He said the Colonel would be here immediately with reinforcements. He did not arrive at once and McDermott asked me if he should go back. I replied, "No," that if Colonel Benteen said he would come, he surely would."⁷

5. Benteen sends six men. (Privates Peter Thompson, Tim (John) Jordan, James Bennett, John McGuire, Alfred Whittaker, and Sgt Daniel Kanipe all of Company C) to take the crest of the hill. Thompson saw the river below the hill as he charged the crest.

Peter Thompson wrote, "I slept so soundly that I heard and knew nothing until I felt some one kicking the soles of my boots. Jumping to my feet I saw Captain Benteen standing by my side. When he saw that I was fully awake he told me that I would have to render some assistance at the head of the ravine up which the Indians were trying to sneak. He added, "If they do succeed it will be all day with us." The Indians had been pouring in volleys upon us long before I had been awakened and they were still at it. Under the cover of darkness they had gained a foothold in some of the numerous ravines that surrounded us. It seemed as if it would be impossible to dislodge them. Some of them were so close to us that their fire was very effective. The ping of the bullets and the groaning and struggling of the wounded horses was oppressive. But my duty was plain. The way I had to go to my post was up a short hill towards the edge of the bluff and the head of the ravine. While packing my ammunition in order to carry it easily I glanced up in the direction I had to go and for the life of me I could not see how I could possibly get there alive for the bullets of the Indians were ploughing up the sand and gravel in every direction, but it was my duty to obey.

After getting everything in shape I started on the run. The fire of the Indians seemed to come from three different directions and all exposed places were pretty well riddled. Even as secure a place as where we had formed our breastwork was no longer safe. The red devils seemed determined to crush us. As I ran up the hill which was but a short distance I was seized with a tendency to shrink up, and was under the impression that I was going to be struck in the legs or feet. I was not the only one to run for the head of the ravine. Captain Benteen was busily hunting up all the men he could to go to the same point in order to keep the Indians in check and if possible to drive the Indians out of the ravine. It did not take me long to reach the top of the bluffs, where I got a glimpse of the village, the river and the mouth of the ravine."⁸

⁶ LT Frank Gibson, Omaha Daily Bee, March 13 1897 <http://thelbha.proboards.com/thread/1872/lt-frank-gibson?page=3>

⁷ LT Frank Gibson, Omaha Daily Bee, March 13 1897 <http://thelbha.proboards.com/thread/1872/lt-frank-gibson?page=3>

⁸ Peter Thompson, narrative

Walter camp wrote about Sgt Knipe, "Next morning when Benteen wanted help he went up with McGuire, Thompson, Whittaker on H Co.'s line."⁹

6. Thompson, Meador and Bennett all wounded at crest.

7. Meador is KIA, Thompson shot in the hand and arm, and Bennett shot in the spine.

Pvt Thompson, "As I was entering the mouth of the ravine a volley was fired by the Indians who occupied it and over I tumbled shot through the right hand and arm."¹⁰

Pvt. Jacob Adams "Captain Benteen ordered a charge and although the hand-to-hand struggle was indescribably fierce, the Indians soon wavered and retired to their former position. Our command also fell back a few feet below the crest of the ridge, where we awaited the next move. While effecting this last slight change of position, my tent-mate, Thomas Meadows (Meador) of West Virginia, fell with a dangerous wound in his right breast. I attempted to carry my wounded comrade back across the ridge, when another bullet struck him in the head, ending his life instantly." Jacob Adams¹¹

Peter Thompson described Pvt Meador's death, "A short distance from me lay a wounded man groaning and struggling in the agony of death. Just as I was thinking of getting up I heard an order given by a Sioux Chief. A heavy volley of bullets was the result. My wounded neighbor gave a scream of agony and then was still."¹²

Pvt James C. Bennett, Company C, would be wounded in the chest, paralyzed below wound and would be moved to the hospital area.

8. Benteen gathers eleven or twelve men to charge the ravine to clear it out. This is considered Benteen's first charge. It is successful. The hill is held and the ravine is cleared.

Pvt. Peter Thompson¹³, "A short distance below I saw several cavalry men who were soon joined by others, eleven in all; a slim force indeed to clean out the ravine held by so many Indians, but they were resolute men. Captain Benteen soon joined them and made a short speech. He said, "This is our only weak and unprotected point and should the Indians succeed in passing this in any force they would soon end the matter as far as we are concerned." "And now," he asked, "Are you ready?" They answered, "Yes." "Then," said he, "charge down there and drive them out." And with a cheer away they dashed, their revolvers in one hand and their carbines in the other. Benteen turned around and walked to the extreme left, seemingly tireless and unconscious of the hail of lead that was flying around him."

Blacksmith Henry Mechling, "I was the extreme skirmisher on the left and my orders was to watch the crossing till driven away, then report to Captain Benteen. In the morning of the 26th, I can't tell the hour, I was forced to retreat and I reported that the Indians had the camp surrounded. Captain Benteen told

⁹ Camp, MSS field notes, box 2 folder8, Daniel A. Knipe. From "Custer in 76" Kenneth Hammer p 94

¹⁰ Peter Thompson, narrative

¹¹ Pvt. Jacob Adams, Company H, Journal of American History 1909

http://www.astonisher.com/archives/museum/jacob_adams2_little_big_horn.html

¹² Peter Thompson, narrative

¹³ Peter Thompson, narrative

me to go back and lie down. He said: "Men, we have the Indians all around us. When I give the order to charge, yell and fire your pieces all you know how."¹⁴

Lt Gibson wrote, "Sure enough, he soon arrived with about ten or twelve men. Considering the smallness of the command and the losses it had sustained, twelve was quite a large number."¹⁵

Pvt. Charles Windolph wrote, "Regarding the three charges led by Col. Fred. Benteen:

1st charge led by Benteen was composed of "H" Troop and men forming the pack train from all companies of the 7th Cav.

2nd charge led by Benteen same as first charge, reinforced by French's ["M"] Troop.

3rd charge was a general charge led by Col. Benteen in person of all the companies engaged, and was undertaken to regain all the ground that had been lost earlier in the morning."¹⁶

9. Thompson makes way to hospital area and is dealt with by Dr. Porter.

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "Going in the direction of the horses I saw what suffering the poor brutes were enduring from thirst and hunger. But we ourselves were no better off. I found in the center of our place of defense that we had a surgeon busily attending to the wounded and dying. I asked him to attend to me when he had time to do so. He soon bandaged up my wounds and told me the only thing that could be done was to apply plenty of water. What mockery! Water was not to be had for love or money. Our way to the river was cut off excepting by the way of the ravine out of which the eleven brave men drove the Indians. But to attempt to get water by that route was too risky. I looked on while the doctor attended to the wounded that were brought in. Some of the poor fellows would never recover, others would be crippled for life and I would carry a broken hand."¹⁷

10. Thompson looks for anyone he knows among the wounded and finds Bennett, who asks for water. "This was on the 26th day of June, a day long to be remembered"

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "I wondered if any of the other members of Company C had been as unfortunate as myself. Although that company had endured the fight with General Custer there were a few who had been detailed on the pack train. So I commenced to search around for them. I first found a man by the name of Bennett whom to know was to respect. I could see that his days were numbered. Kneeling down beside him I asked, "Can I do you any service?" He grasped my hand and drew me closer to him and whispered, "Water, Thompson, water, for God's sake!" Poor fellow, he was past speaking in his usual strong voice. I told him I would get him some if I lived. He released my hand and seemed satisfied and then I began to realize what the promise I had made meant."¹⁸

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "This was on the 26th day of June, a day long to be remembered by all who took an active part, in fact a day never to be forgotten."¹⁹

¹⁴ Blacksmith Henry Mechling, LETTER TO JAMES BRADDOCK, JULY 16, 1921

¹⁵ LT Frank Gibson, Omaha Daily Bee, March 13 1897 <http://thelbha.proboards.com/thread/1872/lt-frank-gibson?page=3>

¹⁶ Pvt. Charles Windolph to Walter Camp, dated May 10th, 1909

¹⁷ Peter Thompson, narrative

¹⁸ Peter Thompson, narrative

¹⁹ Peter Thompson, narrative

11. Thompson sees the crest of the hill is still held and gathers two canteens and kettle and heads for water.

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "All routes to the river were cut off by the Indians. I was determined to make the effort nevertheless, and looked around for a canteen. I thought of the ravine which was cleared by the eleven brave men and hoped that I might be able to make my way to the river by that route. I made some inquiries of some skulkers whom I found in among the horses and from what they told me I concluded that the ravine was the only safe one to take. In a short time I secured two canteens and a coffee kettle. I made my way to the head of the ravine which ran down to the river. I found that very little change had taken place since the incident in the morning."²⁰

12. Crest of the hill Thompson is stopped and questioned. Sgt refused to allow Thompson to go and told "He will never make it back alive".

Pvt Peter Thompson, "Where are you going, and what are you going to do?" The questioner belonged to my own company and I naturally expected him to sympathize with me in my errand of mercy. He not only tried to dissuade me but called to Sergeant Knipe and told him of my intention of going to the river. The Sergeant told me of the hopelessness of the undertaking telling me that if I should ever attempt to make the trip I would never get back alive. I told him that as I could not carry a gun I thought I had better do something to help the wounded and the dying."²¹

13. A sling is made for wounded hand and Thompson goes anyway for he could not fight (wounded right hand).

Pvt Peter Thompson, "Seeing that I was determined to go they said no more but one of the men of Company C, named Tim Jordan gave me a large pocket handkerchief to make a sling for my wounded hand. I started down the ravine."²²

Pvt McGuire told Walter Camp, "McGuire says he saw Peter Thompson go for water after being wounded and before wound was dressed."²³

14. Thompson makes way down ravine and gathers water.

Pvt Peter Thompson, "As I went down the ravine I found it got narrower and deeper and became more lonesome and naturally more depressing. I noticed numerous hoof prints showing that the Indians had made a desperate effort to make an opening through our place of defense by this route. But now it was deserted. After I had traveled a considerable distance I came to a turn in the ravine. Pausing for a moment I looked cautiously around the bend, and there before me was running water, the Little Bighorn River."

Pvt Peter Thompson, "On the opposite side was a thick cover of cottonwood timber the sight of which made me hesitate for a moment. It was possible that some of the Indians were concealed in it to pick

²⁰ Peter Thompson, narrative

²¹ Peter Thompson, narrative

²² Peter Thompson, narrative

²³ Camp, MSS field notes, box 2 folder 8, Daniel A. Knipe. From "Custer in 76" Kenneth Hammer p 125

anyone off who was bold enough to approach the water. But I could see no signs of life and concluded to proceed. I made my way as rapidly as possible toward the bank of the river. I found the ground was very miry. So much so that I was afraid that I might get stuck in the mud. I concluded that there was nothing like trying. I laid down my canteens and took my kettle in my left hand and made several long leaps which landed me close to the water's edge. The water at this point ran very shallow over a sandbar. With a long sweep of my kettle up the stream I succeeded in getting plenty of sand and a little water. Making my way back towards the mouth of the ravine a volley of half a score of rifle balls whistled past me and the lead buried itself in the bank beyond. I gained the shelter of the ravine without a scratch and I was thankful."

15. Thompson returns to hospital area with water and an uproar for want for water erupts by the wounded.

Pvt Peter Thompson, "I did not stop to take a drink until I landed amidst my fellow soldiers. I offered to divide the water of one canteen with some of the men of Company C. They refused my offer when I told them that my effort was made in behalf of the wounded members of our company. On coming to Bennett I placed a canteen in his hand, but he was too weak to lift it to his lips. He was attended by John Mahoney of our company and I had no fear but he would be well cared for. I skirmished around and found two more of my company slightly wounded."²⁴

Pvt Peter Thompson wrote of an uproar as the water was distributed, "The offers of money by the wounded for a drink of water were painful to hear. "Ten dollars for a drink," said one. "Fifteen dollars for a canteen of water," said a second. "Twenty dollars," said a third, and so the bidding went on as at an auction. This made me determine to make another trip and to take a larger number of canteens."²⁵

16. Benteen hears the uproar and asks for volunteers to go for water. First organized water party goes for water.

Pvt. Charles Windolph, "In the afternoon of the 26th, the wounded got to crying so pitifully for water that volunteers were called for to go down the draw on our side of the hill, and get it from the river. Several volunteered, and made the trip under fire from the Sioux hidden in the brush on the opposite side of the river."²⁶

Pvt. August DeVoto, B Co. said, "Our wounded men began calling for water and about a dozen of us volunteered to go to the river and get it. We went down to the river, the ravine protecting us from being exposed to the Indians. When we got to the bottom of the ravine there was an open space of about twenty feet to the bank of the creek. This was very dangerous as it gave Mr. Indian an excellent chance to shoot from his place of concealment on the opposite side of the creek. We each carried as many canteens as we possibly could. It takes quite a little time to fill a canteen, besides, we knew it would mean sure death to stand by the bank to fill them. However, one of the boys had carried down a big camp kettle. The thought struck me that it would be much safer to wade in the stream and get the kettle full of water, and then run back under cover to fill the canteens. I did this."²⁷

²⁴ Peter Thompson, narrative

²⁵ Peter Thompson, narrative

²⁶ Pvt. Charles Windolph, Sunshine Magazine, Sept. 1930

²⁷ Pvt. August DeVoto, Company B, interview with Walter Camp, dated Oct. 1, 1917, and can be found in Richard Hardorff's book Indian Views of the Custer Fight

Sgt. Stanislas Roy, Company A said, "After Benteen's charge the cry for water was very loud, especially the wounded. Some of the enlisted men would propose that some of the men should volunteer to get to the river for this purpose. This talk went around, and finally the officers said if any of the men wanted to volunteer they might do so. Not long after this 19 men volunteered to go, and officers thought this would be too many, but said 12 might go. It was decided that we would take 2 canteens to a man and about 6 2-gal. camp kettles in the party. Sergt. Fehler was one of the sharpshooters and four others. They could command the timber on west bank and kept the Indians from getting thick in there. Nevertheless there were many skulked along the river bank in position to fire on anyone attempting to get water. In going down from top of bluff we had to run across an open space about 100 yards wide to get to head of ravine. From here to river we were concealed from Sioux. We got down to mouth of ravine and could see Indians in brush on opposite bank of river, but we did not want to shoot, to bring an engagement. Ravine 20 yds. from water."²⁸

17. Madden is wounded in knee and left at the river during first organized water party.

Sgt Roy said. "Madden was third man to rush for water and was hit and leg broke, but he crawled back to cover unassisted. He was a big, heavy man and his wound was very painful and requested to be left down there as it hurt him to be disturbed. He thought he would be safe down there. He was carried up some time before dark."²⁹

Pvt. August DeVoto said, "One man by the name of Madden attempted to fill his canteen at the creek and was shot in the leg. His leg was amputated the next day by Dr. Plumer [sic. Porter]. I think that was the Doctor's name."³⁰

18. Benteen arranges for sharp shooters to provide cover fire for the water party: Geiger, Mechlin, Voit and Windolph.

Blacksmith Henry Mechling speaking of Benteen, "Drawing his revolver in a business like manner, he pointed to a knoll or a raise in the ground and asked me if I thought it would be of any advantage if there were some men stationed there. I told him yes, as the Indians were stationed in the timber and the men could cover the timber from that point. He said: "Mechlin, will you go? I can't order you to go." I said: "Yes." And three others, George Geiger, Charles Windolph and Otto Volt, ran down a hill onto a table land, then up to the knoll, getting protection."³¹

Pvt. Charles Windolph, "The sharpshooters would cover their advance and retreat to and from the Little Big Horn, were: Saddler Voit, "H" Troop; Troopers Windolph and Geiger, "H" Troop; Sergt. Roy, "A" Troop,"³²

Pvt. Slaper "went out with the second party. "When the first squad went out," he told Brininstool in 1920, "nobody had the forethought to post a bunch of good shots at a point where they could fire volleys into the brush to silence the fire of the Indians; but when my detachment went for water, several expert

²⁸ Interview with Stanislas Roy, Walter Camp field notes, folders 50 and 99, BYU Library.

²⁹ Interview with Stanislas Roy, Walter Camp field notes, folders 50 and 99, BYU Library.

³⁰ Pvt. August DeVoto, Company B, interview with Walter Camp, dated Oct. 1, 1917, and can be found in Richard Hardorff's book Indian Views of the Custer Fight

³¹ Blacksmith Henry Mechling, LETTER TO JAMES BRADDOCK, JULY 16, 1921

³² Pvt. Charles Windolph to Walter Camp, dated May 10th, 1909

riflemen [four sharpshooters, including Private Windolph] were instructed to fire volleys into the brush....In spite of this an Indian managed to put a hole through the camp kettle I carried."³³

19. Thompson makes his second trip for water and finds Madden in pool of blood. Thompson in which effort receives a head wound (three inch furrow) on right side of skull.

Blacksmith Henry Mechling wrote, "I got in as sharpshooter, but was not very long in this place till a man said: "Come, let's go down to the stream and get some water for the wounded." These men, the wounded, were calling for water. We loaded with canteens across the shoulders and down to the stream we went, but there was one man, Mike Madden, who preceded us. Mike Madden was a saddler belonging to K Troop. He did not get any water as the Indians had shot him through both legs, and on the 27th of June he had one leg amputated. He took nothing but a drink of whiskey, saying to the doctor after the amputation took place: "Give me another pull at the bottle and you can take the other leg off.

We took two camp kettles that Madden had, filled them with water, went back into the ravine where we filled our canteens. We had a hard time getting back up the hill on account of the heft of the canteens which were filled with water. We gave water to the Field Hospital and took some to the men in the half circle (or breast works [of boxes and saddle packs]). I asked Captain Benteen if he wanted a drink. He said he would give all he was worth for a drink. I gave him a drink from the canteen. He asked me where I got it and I told him that another man and myself went down to the stream and got it. Here I will state that I don't recall who the man was, but would give a great deal to know."³⁴

Pvt. Charles Windolph, "The troopers that went for water were Blacksmith Mechling and Trooper [Peter] Thompson."³⁵

Pvt Peter Thompson, "My next trip to the river was taken with more courage. But as on the former occasion when I came to the bend in the ravine I halted and looked carefully around the corner. I was astonished at seeing a soldier sitting on a bank of earth facing the river with his back towards me. I was curious to know who he was. I came up to him and saw that he had two camp kettles completely riddled with bullets. He had his gun in his hand and his eyes fixed on the grove of timber across the river, watching the enemy. On looking him over I could see the reason for his sitting and watching as he did. I discovered a pool of blood a short distance from him which had come from a terrible wound in his leg. It was impossible for him to move any further without assistance. I asked him how he received his wound. He told me he had gone to the river for water and when he was coming up from the bed of the river with his two kettles filled with water a volley had been fired at him, one of the bullets hitting him and breaking his leg below the knee, the other riddling his kettles. He had managed to make his way under cover of the ravine to the place where I found him. I then told him as it was my turn now I would proceed to business. He tried to dissuade me, but as I would not go back without water and it was useless for me to remain at this place, I laid down my canteens and grasped the camp kettle which I had left on my previous trip. I walked forward looking into the grove for signs of Indians, but not a sign of life could be seen. Looking to see where the water was the deepest I made a few long leaps which landed me in the water with a loud splash. I knew it was useless for me to try to avoid being seen so I depended on my ability to escape the bullets of the Indians. A volley was fired, but I again escaped."³⁶

³³ Pvt. Slaper, William C., Company M, Interview with Brininstool

³⁴ Blacksmith Henry Mechling, LETTER TO JAMES BRADDOCK, JULY 16, 1921

³⁵ Pvt. Charles Windolph to Walter Camp, dated May 10th, 1909

³⁶ Peter Thompson, narrative

Escaped, yes, but Peter Thompson received a head wound (three inch furrow) on right side of skull. Many years later, Thompson's daughter, Susan, began writing her works. She described the head wound as a three inch furrow in the right scalp, "a groove, long and quite depressed". Susan said Thompson began his writings as his hand healed at Ft A Lincoln. He wrote in a ledger type 8x12 ½ book of blank pages that were sewn together.³⁷ Further stating that it was so painful for him to write with his crippled hand.³⁸

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "Madden, the wounded man I had just left watched me with the greatest interest. When I returned to him I urged him to take a drink but he refused to do so saying he was not in need of it. This caused me some surprise as I knew he had lost a great deal of blood which is almost invariably followed by great thirst. I made haste to fill the canteens and started on my way to camp bidding Mike Madden be of good cheer and he made a cheerful reply."³⁹

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "After leaving three canteens for the wounded at the hospital, I took the other two and gave them to my wounded comrades. After this I began to feel very sick and looked around for a sheltered place to avoid the heat of the sun. This sickness was caused by the loss of blood and the pain in my hand, which at this time had swelled to a great size."⁴⁰

20. Warriors amass south end of Company H. Benteen goes for reinforcements and Company M is sent. During this episode Pvt Tanner is wounded. This is Benteen's Second Charge.

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "I saw Captain Benteen dash into the midst of our horses and drive out several men who were hiding and skulking among them. "Get out of here," he cried, "and do your duty." It soon became known that the Indians were concentrating for an attack upon our lines. They had closed in around us on three sides and so close were they that we could hear them talking. Captain Benteen seemed to be aware of the impending danger and was forming all the men he possibly could into line at the point where it was expected that the Indians would attack us."⁴¹

Pvt. Charles Windolph, Regarding the three charges led by Col. Fred. Benteen: ... 2nd charge led by Benteen same as first charge, reinforced by French's ["M"] Troop.⁴²

First Sergeant Ryan, Company M. "In the early morning, the Indians made a very determined effort to break through the lines of the surrounded troops. Captain Benteen's company was particularly troubled and Captain French's M Company was withdrawn from their part of the line and rushed to assist Benteen's Company H. Both companies made a charge which drove the Indians back down the hill. First Sergeant Ryan took part in this action and recorded: "Private James Tanner of Company M, was badly wounded in this charge, and his body lay on the side of the bluffs in an exposed position. There was a call for volunteers to bring him down, and I grabbed a blanket with three other men, rushed to his assistance,

³⁷ "Coming to an Understanding of Peter Thompson & His Account" Michael Wyman & Rocky Boyd. CBHMA Symposium, June 25, 2004. p. 38. Ref: Taylor, Susan. Unpublished manuscript in the possession of the Thompson family, preface, p. iv.

³⁸ The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Nathaniel Philbrick. Susan Thompson, daughter of Peter Thompson, unpublished manuscript, she described the scar as "a groove, long and quite depressed" across his skull.

³⁹ Peter Thompson, narrative

⁴⁰ Peter Thompson, narrative

⁴¹ Peter Thompson, narrative

⁴² Pvt. Charles Windolph to Walter Camp, dated May 10th, 1909

rolled him into the blanket, and made tracks in getting him from the side of the bluffs to where our wounded lay. Fortunately none of the rescuing party received any more than a few balls through their clothing. After placing Tanner with the rest of the wounded, he died in a few minutes.”⁴³

Private William O. Taylor, “During the forenoon Captain Benteen went over to the north side where Major Reno was and asked him for reinforcements. He believed that the Indians would soon charge his position, and as he has but one troop to hold the south line, the chances were that if the Indians did make a rush they would run right over the few men left in his Company and have all the rest of us between two fires. After some urging Reno finally ordered Captain French to take his troop over to the south side. Soon after the arrival of M Troop, Benteen ordered a charge and succeeded in driving the Indians from his front nearly to the river. A number of the soldiers were wounded but only one seriously. And that was Private Tanner of M Troop who fell a short way down the hill. After the charge, a party of his comrades rushed down the slope, rolled him on a blanket and amidst a severe fire bore him back to the lines where he died soon afterwards”⁴⁴

21. Thompson meets Pvt Tanner and makes third trip for water.

Pvt. Peter Thompson, “When I came to where the horses were huddled together I heard a voice feebly calling my name. Looking up the direction of the sound I saw a man by the name of Tanner lying close to some sage brush. Someone had thrown the cape of an overcoat over him to protect him from the sun. Kneeling down by his side I asked him what I could do for him. He told me he was done for and asked me to get him a drink of water. I saw from the nature of the wound that his hours were numbered. I secured a blanket on which I placed him. Having only one hand with which to do the work I found it hard work to move him. I then got an overcoat and made a pillow for his head and used my overcoat to shelter him.

Pvt. Peter Thompson wrote, “I made my way to the river. I found Madden had been removed and it made me feel a little lonesome on this trip. But I had become so indifferent to my surroundings that I did not care whether the Indians fired at me or not. So I walked into the river, filled my camp kettles and as slowly returned to my task of filling my canteens. All this time the Indians did not fire at me.”

22. Upon returning Thompson finds Tanner has been moved to the hospital.

Returning from the river, Pvt. Peter Thompson wrote, “I would go and see how Tanner was getting along. When I approached the place where I had left him I saw a man tugging away at the overcoat which I had placed under his head. Rushing forward I seized the man by the coat collar and sent him sprawling on the ground some distance away. He sprang to his feet with a loud curse and with vengeance in his eye looked me over from head to foot. I said, “Get out of here and be quick about it.” We will call him Nelson although that was not his real name, but we will have reason to mention him again so it is well to call him something. He was the most profane man I ever heard. After he had gone I turned to Tanner and found that he was dead. He had died before his wish for a drink of water could be gratified. He was a man of excellent qualities. A bond of warmest friendship had bound us together which was only severed by death. I drew the cape over his face. It was the last thing I could do for him. I thought this was a hard way to die and I did not know how soon my turn might come. I now picked up my canteens which I had

⁴³ First Sergeant Ryan, Company M, <http://csharpsarms.com/famoussharps-article/14/First-Sergeant-Ryan.html>

⁴⁴ Private William O. Taylor, Company A, With Custer On The Little Bighorn, published Viking, New York, 1996. from a 1917 manuscript.

dropped when I grasped Nelson. I distributed the water among those who needed it but kept one canteen for Bennett. I told Mahoney who was attending him that I would leave more water with him that I might come around for a drink once in a while. I asked him if he thought Bennett would pull through. He shook his head sadly and said, "I don't think so." I knew Bennett would receive the best attention so I made my way out of the basin in which the hospital was situated."⁴⁵

23. Firing continues till about three o'clock and begins to subside.

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "The fire on the part of the Indians became continuous. If they had any hopes of driving us back from our position they were disappointed. We were like rats in a hole, we could go no further. From about three o'clock in the afternoon until the day wore away the Indians fire grew less thus showing that they were getting disheartened at the prospect of getting our scalps or their ammunition was running low."

24. Thompson makes fourth trip for water.

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "On my way down into the ravine I found the five citizen packers. As packers they were a success, but as fighters, they were failures. Before they had found shelter of the ravine the head packer had received a serious wound in the head by a spent ball. His bandaged head and blood stained face made him look "tough"."

A spent bullet hit the regiment's chief packer, John Wagoner, in the head. Instead of killing him, it merely knocked him unconscious. Once he'd been revived, his bloody head was wrapped in a bandage, and Wagoner lived for many years afterward with the bullet still lodged against his skull.⁴⁶

25. As this long to be remembered day was drawing to a close.

Pvt. Peter Thompson, "As this long to be remembered day was drawing to a close we became conscious that the firing on the part of the Indians was gradually ceasing, and we began to move around with a little more freedom. About seven o'clock in the evening we noticed that the Indians were massing their ponies close to the village. We also noticed that the teepees were being rapidly torn down and the women were packing their effects and strapping them on their pack animals. As the evening grew dark they began to move slowly away from the river to the direction of the Big Horn Mountains. We tried to estimate the number of their fighting men but it was difficult to do owing to the fact that they had their families with them, a conservative estimate of the number of warriors was about 2800. A few of the Indians remained and kept up a scattering fire as if loath to give us up. As darkness closed around us the last shots came whistling over our heads. Thus a close came to one of the shortest and bloodiest engagements between the government and Indians which had taken place in recent years. With the exception of the sentries and the wounded, whose moanings could be heard at any hour of the night, our camp was wrapped in slumber. As for myself, I could have slept under almost any circumstances."

So ended "A Day Long to be Remembered".

26. Medal of Honor awarded.

⁴⁵ Peter Thompson, narrative

⁴⁶ The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Nathaniel Philbrick.

Excerpt from Expiration of term of enlistment of Peter Thompson, September 20, 1880. Peter Thompson a private of Company C of the Seventh Regiment of Cavalry...is hereby discharged from the Army of the United States. "This soldier participater in the Battle of the Little Big Horn MT. June 25, 1876 and was given a medal of honor for conspicuous bravery in said battle."⁴⁷

Peter Thompson was awarded and received the Medal of Honor October 5, 1878
Citation for the medal:

**"After having voluntarily brought water to the wounded,
in which effort he was shot through the head,
he made two successful trips for the same purpose,
notwithstanding remonstrances of his sergeant."⁴⁸**



Peter Thompson (center) during the 50th Anniversary of the Battle, 1926

⁴⁷ Expiration of term of enlistment of Peter Thompson, September 20, 1880. Notarized copy, Nov. 26, 1921, held at High Plains Western Heritage Center, Spearfish, SD
http://www.polfdesign.com/Bucket/Expiration_Papers.JPG

⁴⁸ The U.S. Army Center of Military History
<https://history.army.mil/html/moh/indianwars.html#THOMPSONP>

Biography

Gerry Schultz is a member of the Little Big Horn Associates having joined in 2008. He is an active member of the LBHA Message Pro Board and can be found there as "Gerry". Known as a proponent of Private Peter Thompson, Co C, Seventh Cavalry. Gerry first began his studies after finding an original copy of "Custer's Last Fight, The Experience of a Private Soldier in the Custer Massacre" by Peter Thompson. This document guided him through his studies.

Gerry can be found every year at the Real Bird Custer Battle re-enactment, and be found at Fort Abraham Lincoln, Fort Buford and various forts that played a part in the 1876 campaign. Gerry also speaks at various organizations. After speaking at the Carter County Historical Society, Brice Lambert, publisher/editor of the "Ekalaka Eagle", wrote, "Dressed as cavalry trooper Schultz took the audience through Thompson's enlistment, his training at Jefferson Barracks in St Louis, his posting to Fort Lincoln at Bismarck, and his trek with Custer's command to the Little Bighorn in Montana. As he progressed through Thompson's story, Schultz stopped frequently to offer details of a trooper's life during the campaign...During the desperate battle itself, Thompson's experiences came alive."

Gerry and his wife, Cori, raised three girls and are now the proud grandparents of seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. A veteran, 1973-77, U.S. Navy. Honored with a degree of Doctor of Teletype Therapeutics. FCC Licensed. In 2014 Gerry retired after 36 years working in telecommunications for the BNSF Railway. Gerry and Cori reside at Bloomfield, MT.