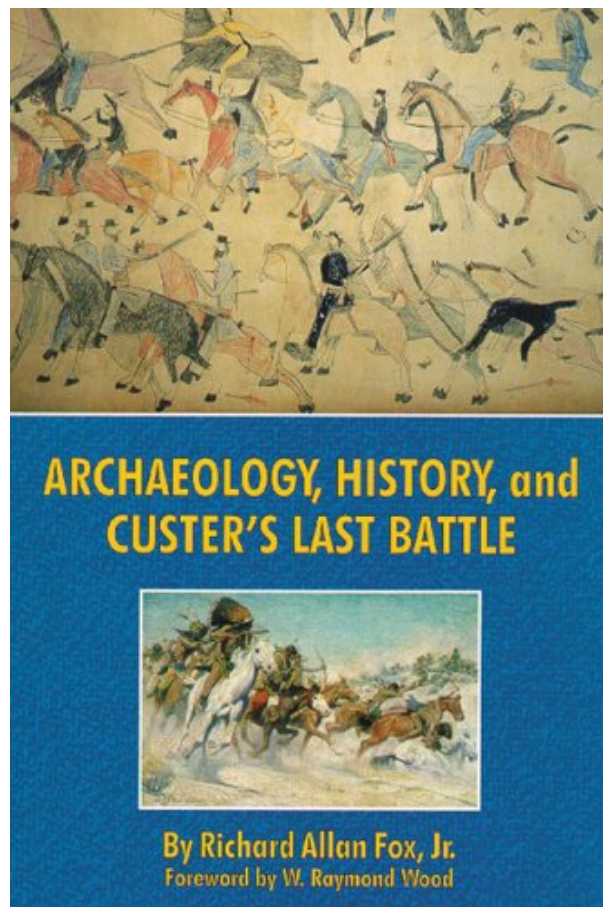


ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY, AND CUSTER'S LAST BATTLE: THE LITTLE BIG HORN REEXAMINED BY RICHARD A. FOX



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ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY, and CUSTER'S LAST BATTLE



By Richard Allan Fox, Jr.
Foreword by W. Raymond Wood

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About the Author

W. Raymond Wood is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Missouri, Columbia. He has authored or edited numerous articles and books on western American history and archaeology, including "Prologue to Lewis and Clark: The Mackay and Evans Expedition", also published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

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ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY, AND CUSTER'S LAST BATTLE: THE LITTLE BIG HORN REEXAMINED BY RICHARD A. FOX PDF

On the afternoon of June 25, 1867, an overwhelming force of Sioux and Cheyenne Indians quickly mounted a savage onslaught against General George Armstrong Custer's battalion, driving the doomed troopers of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry to a small hill overlooking the Little Bighorn River, where Custer and his men bravely erected their heroic last stand.

So goes the myth of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, a myth perpetuated and reinforced for over 100 years. In truth, however, "Custer's Last Stand" was neither the last of the fighting nor a stand.

Using innovative and standard archaeological techniques, combined with historical documents and Indian eyewitness accounts, Richard Allan Fox, Jr. vividly replays this battle in astonishing detail. Through bullets, spent cartridges, and other material data, Fox identifies combat positions and tracks soldiers and Indians across the Battlefield. Guided by the history beneath our feet, and listening to the previously ignored Indian testimonies, Fox reveals scenes of panic and collapse and, ultimately, a story of the Custer battle quite different from the fatalistic versions of history. According to the author, the five companies of the Seventh Cavalry entered the fray in good order, following planned strategies and displaying tactical stability. It was the sudden disintegration of this cohesion that caused the troopers' defeat. The end came quickly, unexpectedly, and largely amid terror and disarray. Archaeological evidences show that there was no determined fighting and little firearm resistance. The last soldiers to be killed had rushed from Custer Hill.

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Most helpful customer reviews

96 of 110 people found the following review helpful.

Well written book, no matter what you think.

By Graham Henderson

I think the polarisation of the reviews here tells the whole story. You are either going to love this book or hate it. Those who favour the revisionist view will love it, and those who like the accepted, "historical"

image of Custer's Last Stand are going to hate it.

So let me help you to figure out whether you want this book or not. For me there should be a middle ground. You can disagree -- but you have to admire the scholarship and the effort. Fox clearly stands on his own -- a "blazed pine in a clearing of Custer devotees" (to paraphrase James Fenimore Cooper).

In a nutshell, Fox's thesis is that there WAS no last stand. He took advantage of the burn-down that occurred some years back to get in there with metal detectors. He undertook a minute forensic examination of the battlefield. For Fox, the evidence seemed to suggest a rout. Were there to have been a last stand, one would have expected multiple shell casings from a given gun in a given firing position. In fact, he could find no evidence of this. What he did find was shell casings from the same gun in positions that suggested the individual firing the gun was "vectoring" -- i.e. constantly on the move. The image is of a group of men running, stopping briefly to fire over their shoulders, and then moving on. This is but one of dozens of examples he gives.

As with any evidence, it is open to interpretation. And people will always disagree. But agree or disagree with Fox, the reason the book HAS to get four stars and not one, is that it is so well written, so persuasively written. I do not believe a book earns a one star review because it advances a thesis that may be incorrect. For me? I have to say the jury is still out.

Yet Fox is persuasive not only because of the archeological evidence, but because he relies quite heavily upon the oral tradition handed down by the aboriginal fighters who were present that day.

I find it amusing that certain of Fox's detractors actually purport to RELY on the oral evidence. For generations the accepted view of the battle completely IGNORED the oral historical evidence. And, indeed, the preponderance of this evidence favours Fox's view. One has to decide for oneself whether there is credence to be given to the oral histories -- I am not so sure how much credence should be given.

Fox also analyses then current manuals of combat to try and figure out how Custer's men would have fought and stationed themselves -- and again, he makes this evidence neatly fit his hypothesis.

Now, we have to be careful about something here. Fox at no time questions the heroism of the men involved in this struggle -- though Custer's command performance clearly ranks up there with the top dumb ... performances of all time -- but his men were brave, fought valiantly and died heroically.

So, if you absolutely LOVE the accepted view of Custer -- be prepared for a rough ride. But if you have an open mind and are ready for an extremely interesting, but rough, ride buy this book.

And, one foot note - something that has always saddened me is the treatment doled out by history to Major Reno and Captain Benteen. These guys DID conduct a disciplined, last ditch defence. And did so dug into a hillside for THREE days. There is no debate about this at ALL. They were down to throwing rocks at their tormentors when the Sioux suddenly pulled out. Yet such was Custer's lustre, that Reno was branded a coward for NOT going to his commander's aid -- even though that was clearly impossible. He was originally buried in a pauper's grave. Scandalous. WILL SOMEONE PLEASE MAKE A MOVIE ABOUT MAJOR RENO?

46 of 53 people found the following review helpful.

The most exhaustive, complete and accurate work yet.

By m13

As a cultural anthropologist with emphasis on plains indian tribes and history and a frequent visitor to the Little Big Horn Battlefield Monument, I have read Mr. Fox's book a number of times and have gone over the ground with it in hand. I have also read many of the other accounts, both contemporary and historical to attempt an understanding of what occurred at the Little Big Horn. Fox's precise, analytical and well-reasoned account, taking into consideration the physical evidence at the site, seems irrefutable. Contrary to one reviewer, I found no evidence of "rambling" at all, but a thorough analysis of all aspects of the battle from archeological evidence, oral and written histories to US Army Cavalry tactics in use at the time, that support Fox's thesis, which is different and original from all that have preceded it. Congratulations to Mr. Fox for a model of historical, archeological and anthropological research. I believe he has indeed broken new ground

in the field. If you have any interest at all in the plains tribes, Custer or western history you owe it to yourself to read this fine book.

24 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

Worth a Trip to the Little big Horn

By Daniel Hurley

This is an update on my previous review. I recently took a two-day tour of the LBH with Fox and former Superintendent Jim Court and reading the text before the tour was very helpful. Aside from the archeology that determine that the Sioux and Cheyenne were well armed with at least 200 repeaters, the key to the mystery of what happened to Custer and his battalion(s) takes place at Medicine Trail Coulee. Some historians say that Custer was repelled and forced to retreat, others say he was shot at he ford putting the attack into confusion and early historians thought the ford was at the center of the village and that he had to move further downstream. Fox's theory is that the main population had already fled north thus "no one was home" other than the warriors fighting Reno and a few that happened to be at the ford. Thus Custer moves further north to cut them off leaving a rear guard on Calhoun Hill (south battle ridge) possibly for Benteen to connect. Fox essentially believes Custer was still on the offensive and confident when the high influx of warriors began to fracture his spread command. As Fox pointed our on the tour the lack of headstones near the ford and the ridges east of it indicate that there was not any significant loss of casualties which helps support his theory that Custer was still on the offensive and not retreating. The latter would seem to make sense to anyone at the battlefield since Custer's commands are spread far apart and not in a defensive perimeter. May not be the final theory but a very reasonable possibility and very thought provoking.

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