

Battle of Rosebud River (1873):

This battle in the spring of 1873 was one of the most famous encounters between Metis and Dakota hunting parties. The Dakota encountered a large party of about 500 Metis bison hunters at the mouth of Fat Horse Creek on the Rosebud River (present day Montana), near where it enters the Yellowstone River. The Metis upon being confronted drew their carts into a large circle in a depression on the south bank of the river. They placed the horses (over 200) in the centre of this circle. Trenches were dug beneath the Red River carts and log barricades were placed in front of these. The Metis were well armed with long-range rifles and had a small cannon in addition. They drove back the first Dakota attack. The Dakota then placed themselves on the surrounding hilltops and a long range rifle battle ensued. Many were killed on both sides, but the Dakota eventually disengaged because they could not stand up to the deadly aim of the Metis marksmen. One of the tragedies of this battle concerns a Metis woman. After the fight as the women were cooking supper for the men, one was carrying her baby on her back on a cradleboard. She went about her work cooking supper, unaware of the Dakota arrow that was sticking through the heart of the child on her back, pinning it to the cradleboard, which had saved the mother's life.

Accounts of the battle appear in Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (Henry Holt: New York 1993):

- Only a few months later, in April 1873, the Hunkpapas had another encounter with Slotas (Red River Métis), this one even more violent. Some two to three hundred Slotas had crossed the Yellowstone and moved south up the Rosebud. They had thus penetrated deep into Sioux hunting grounds, and the Sioux looked on them as interlopers, far from their rightful territory and probably prospecting for gold. His people had never fought the Slotas before, observed Old Bull, but they were trespassing.
- At least eight Hunkpapas died in the futile assault on the Slota position. ... the Slota fight again highlighted the flaws in the Sioux style of combat against a well-armed and disciplined foe. ... pp 102-4.
- By April 16 [1877] Sitting Bull had reached a Slota trading camp on the Big Bend of Milk River, clearly headed for the international boundary. p 181.
- [May 1877, moving up the White Mud River] Sitting Bull had occasionally been in this country in the past, following the buffalo or seeking Slotas to trade with. He would later say that he had been reared among the Slotas, who taught him to shoot. They may have, although the relationship doubtless occurred less in the Queen's country than in Dakota and Montana, where the Slotas also ranged much as did the Sioux. P. 184.

Professor Walter Stanley Campbells' interview notes with Old Bull regarding this battle are attached below (University of Oklahoma archives¹):

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SB baptised - don't know -

1873 - fire in trenches - French breeds
where ^{on} Fat Horse Creek runs into yellow
^{Canyon River Rosebud}
blow -
Season - early spring -
no - S - whole camp - SB. Q. O.,
100 counts chosen - Old Bull 1 - spied em
He ^{all} came close - & shot - fire lit -
saw Fr make trenches - cannon fired -
expect to rip them out - mistaken -
Indo ~~not~~ use bows - Fr firing between
lines at S. 4 wheel wagon - Fr = 500 -
SB - not seen - all under cover -
Sioux horse shot he shot them hips -
- Thunder Hawks - Kill Hawk shot - killed -
- horses in trenches - Strook 2 horses -
how long last fire - not many told now

¹ Box 104, Folder: Research Correspondence and Interviews for *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux: A Biography*.

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SB yelled "It's impossible to b.
em all. You can figure yourself
how it is. They are lying in bunches.
We can't see 'em!"

2) ^{Sixty} shot in head | SB had gun
Knives
2 Crows

S. Some ~~start~~ home - F₁, came over 40' -
just them - some old men kids sitting
under a tree on hill smoking - F₂ []
came on em & cb. kids & 3 old men -
had long-range guns -
S. scared -

(Sidney got guns from traders - T.R.
gun worth - 1 horse or 4-5 robes -

could do nothing - terribly - tried to get
body - got them till sundown - next
day - after F's gone - recover bodies -
never fought F's like this before -
now by trespass, 5 feet - F's came
for gold -

Givendstone

three old men b.	}	2 Cross
		2 man

To start

See Calendar of 1871 - Chasing Horses in Camp -

Notes

Then O'B went out & found horses in route -
Moppy man reports that Crosses are already
in camp. Get ready. O'B set + heard it + ran
towards his horses - Some one yelled -

"What are you sitting about - the foe is already
gon with the horses? I lay low with my
hired + saw for coming with bunch horses -

References:

Stanley Vestal, *Warpath, the True Story of the Fighting Sioux*. New York, Houton Mifflin Co., 1934: 154-160.

Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull*. New York: Henry Holt, 1993.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute