

FIREARMS IN THE INDIAN WARS

1862 to 1891

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historians and other writers have written at great length concerning the importance of the frontier in American history and of a variety of factors that influenced the advancement and final extinction of the frontier. The passing of the buffalo, the introduction of barbed wire, the coming of the railroads to the great plains, and numerous other developments have been studied in their relation to the history of the last great American frontier. The Indian wars themselves have been fairly well covered by historians of the post-Civil War frontier. These studies have included the psychology of the Indians, their religion, the structure of their society, biographies of eminent white and Indian leaders, the history of the army's operations in the Indian wars and campaigns in the western mountains and plains regions, and the causes of the various Indian wars. One very important factor, that of the firearms acquired by the Indians and the arms and equipment of the troops sent against them has been largely overlooked by most historians. Some prominent historians, notably Walter Prescott Webb, have recognized the importance of this factor and included it in their works; however, the subject has never been covered in adequate fashion. This paper will deal with the subject of the arms factor in the Indian wars and campaigns in great enough detail to illustrate the importance of the arms used in determining the conduct and outcome of the Indian wars between 1862 and 1891.

An efficient armed force depends largely on the following factors: good

leadership, a high degree of discipline and organization, and an adequate supply of quality arms and equipment. The Indians were generally well led, had a fair degree of organization (but no discipline), and in the years between 1862 and 1876 gradually acquired arms of equal or higher quality as those issued to the troops. Prior to the 1860's, the hostile Indians were armed with a motley assortment of old flintlock military and trade muskets, a sprinkling of percussion rifles and muskets, lances, bow and arrow, and hand to hand weapons such as the knife, club and tomahawk.

In the decade of the 1850's, the army was changing over from smooth-bore to rifled arms, and was also testing several of the breech-loading arms invented by Sharp, Morse, Colt, Maynard, and others. The difference between the rifle and the musket is well illustrated by the following:

The Indians were vastly more numerous than the troops, but the latter were armed with rifle-muskets, just then [1858] issued to the army, the former with smooth-bores. The superiority of the rifle was at once strikingly manifest. The Indians, waiting until their smooth-bores were effective, found themselves mowed down by troops whom their own projectiles could not reach. They were signally defeated at Four Lakes..., Spokane Plains..., and Spokane River.¹

While the above statement serves to demonstrate the superiority of the muzzle-loading rifle over the smooth-bore musket, the increased efficiency of breech-loading arms compared to all muzzle-loaders is seen in the comment that:

In the same year [1858], on our western frontier, Colonel Wright's command, armed principally with breech-loading [Sharp's] carbines, utterly routed, without the loss of a man, a large band of Indians who had previously defeated Colonel Steptoe's forces, who were armed with the old muskets and carbines.²

¹ Lieutenant William E. Birkhimer, "The Third Regiment of Artillery", in Theodore F. Rodenbough and William L. Haskin, editors, The Army of the United States (New York: Maynard, Merrill, & Co., 1896), 344.

² Winston O. Smith, The Sharps Rifle (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1943), 12.

The use of muzzle-loading arms by mounted troops placed them on the same level as the Indians, because, "The rifle [muzzle-loading] being clumsy to handle mounted necessitated firing one round and then riding the enemy down with the sabre".³ With an empty gun, the soldier was forced to fight in the manner best understood by the Indian - hand to hand.

Muzzle-loading arms were standard issue up to the adoption of breech-loading arms in 1865 and 1866. These military muzzle-loading arms reached their highest state of perfection in the Springfield rifle-musket, model of 1855. This arm was well constructed, accurate, and deadly at distances four times as great as the range of the best smooth-bore musket. In the early 1850's

the rifle was little used by mounted Indians, as it could not be reloaded on horseback, but many of them were armed with guns of the most nondescript character. . . smooth-bores of every antique pattern. . . . bullets were purposely made so much smaller than the bore of the gun as to run down when dropped in the muzzle. . . .the Indian filled his mouth with bullets. After firing he reloaded in full career, by turning up the powder horn, emptying an unknown quantity of powder into his gun, and then spitting a bullet into the barrel. There was little danger to be apprehended from such weapons, so loaded, and the troops did not hesitate even with the sabre alone, to rush on any odds of Indians.⁴

While the infantry were invariably armed with muzzle-loading rifles and muskets, the officers, and all cavalry were armed, by 1862, with revolvers, usually the model 1860 Colt's Army Revolver, calibre .44. In the 1850's, many mounted troops carried Colt's six-shot Dragoon Revolver, a heavy, .44 calibre arm more accurate than a musket and which could be operated as fast as the most skillful Indian could discharge his arrows. The revolver had a great

³ Captain Charles Morton, "The Third Regiment of Cavalry", in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 196.

⁴ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington and Company, 1883), 450.

influence on Indian fighting. "The revolver multiplied every soldier by six and had such a good effect on troop morale while completely demoralizing the Indians, that fights became simple chases."⁵

As of 1862, the Indians were still armed chiefly with old muskets, bow and arrow, and a very few rifles and revolvers. In almost every respect the soldiers had the equipment advantage over the Indians, and profited immensely thereby as the easy victors in most actions.

For many years prior to 1862, the beginning date for this paper, some of those Indians who entered into treaty relations with the United States were annually furnished arms and ammunition as part of their treaty stipulations.⁶ These arms were all muzzle-loading, and were usually as good if not better than the arms of the troops. In the early days, the supposedly friendly Indian was given a .54 calibre flintlock musket. As percussion arms came into general use by the late 1840's and early 1850's, the treaty holding tribes were given some percussion rifles of about .44 calibre. These latter arms were as good as any of the army's rifles, except at long ranges. They were made by some of the best gunsmiths and were in no way poor or makeshift arms. The Indians were also given powder and lead for these guns and were allowed to purchase ammunition as needed.

Many tribes still had relatively little contact with the agents of the United States government, and the procurement of firearms by these people was a little more difficult - they were not given arms by the Indian Bureau except as presents at councils and other gatherings promoted by the government.

⁵ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington and Company, 1883), 450.

⁶ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), 91.

Traders in contraband firearms supplied these Indians with weapons as part of a lucrative and well established trade. The illegal arms traffic usually consisted of the sale of old army muskets in the period before 1865; however, ✓ a significant number of Indians obtained the much prized Colt revolvers in this manner. Generally, these trade guns were inferior or obsolete weapons, but in the late 1860's and early 1870's the gun runners supplied the Indians with breech-loading and repeating rifles and revolvers. Another source of arms utilized by many Indians was that of stealing them from the unwary or attacking small parties of whites and friendly Indians to secure the arms they carried. This was a very unreliable avenue of supply, but did serve to furnish many Indians with weapons that were often better than those of the army. Colonel Richard I. Dodge reported a good example of this source of supply in connection with the leader of a small party of Sioux Indians who visited his camp:

Across his saddle he carried a magnificent buffalo gun of the very best patent; on each side of his belt was a holster containing a beautiful, ivory-handled Colt's revolver, and across his shoulder was a most excellent field-glass. The rascal had been "in luck", killed some rich man on a hunt for pleasure, and secured his outfit.⁷

The foregoing episode occurred in the 1870's, but the practise of securing good arms by this means was an old custom.

In addition to firearms, the plains Indians were armed with the bow and lance extensively. The former was as accurate as a smooth-bore musket and could be discharged many times faster; an Indian could often expend an entire quiver of arrows in the time it took for a soldier to reload his musket. The lance was as good a weapon as the sabre for mounted fighting, and in the melee of an old style cavalry charge accounted for many a trooper. A favorite type of lance was constructed by inserting a sabre or sword blade in the end of a

⁷ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 424.

long, light pole. In 1868, a three hundred-year-old Spanish lance was captured from a Commanche warrior.⁸

The acquiring of firearms was not an unmixed blessing for the Indians. First, it made the Indian dependent on the government and traders for powder and percussion caps, and for the special metallic cartridges in the period after the early 1870's. Secondly, until the Indians obtained breech-loading arms, they were at a disadvantage because of the difficulty of reloading a muzzle-loading gun while mounted. For these reasons the Indians still retained the bow and lance, and were forced to fall back on them when their guns were broken or when they could not obtain ammunition.

The government troops of the period preceeding 1862 were almost all armed with muzzle-loaders. Many new arms were tried, but inertia and prejudice served to keep the soldier from being armed with the improved weapons.⁹ These were the days of headlong cavalry charges and pitched Indian battles, where most of the Indians had inferior weapons and the troopers generally had the best muzzle-loading long arms and revolvers.

The comparison of army and Indian arms made here indicates that prior to the 1860's the Indians were generally not as well armed as the soldiers, but that many of them had been given arms by the government. This may seem hard to believe, as it was not a logical policy; and the only answer lies in the fact that the Indian Bureau made their policy independent from that of the army, and there was rarely any correlation between the two policies. This matter will be referred to often concerning the Indian wars of the period covered in this paper.

⁸ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 115.

⁹ Ibid., 288.

The Sioux outbreak in Minnesota that began in 1862 was carried on by Indians armed largely with old weapons and was suppressed by troops who were generally better armed and who also used that weapon hated most by Indians - the cannon or "wagon gun." This was still the day of pitched battles and hand fighting. A transitional period in weapons used by the army and the Indians is seen in the late 1860's, when the army adopted breech-loading arms while the Indians were still mostly armed with muzzle-loaders, but were procuring the new types of rifles, carbines and revolvers in ever increasing numbers. The middle period is found in the 1870's, when the Indians procured repeating and other breech-loading weapons and the troops were equipped with single-shot rifles and carbines and Colt revolvers. The last phase is seen in the late seventies, the 1880's, and the early 1890's, when the army increasingly employed the Gatling and Hotchkiss guns, and other types of rapid fire weapons as well as improved artillery.

Succeeding chapters will present a chronological development of the weapons and the changes in them that occurred during the Indian wars from 1862 to 1891. They will also emphasize the significance of the arms factor in the conduct and outcome of the major Indian campaigns, from the day of the muzzle-loader to that of the machine gun and magazine rifle.

CHAPTER II

THE TRIUMPH OF THE BREECH-LOADER

The era of the Indian wars that ended in 1891, began with the Minnesota Sioux outbreak in August, 1862. The efforts and attention of the nation were then directed toward the raging Civil War, and this Indian uprising, one of the bloodiest in the long history of frontier warfare, attracted little attention at the time.

The causes for the outbreak were many, and numbered among them were the usual grievances that Indian lands and rights were being infringed upon by the whites, and the not insignificant fact that the Sioux knew that the army could ill afford to spare troops from the forces fighting in the South. In addition to these causes, the relaxation of the vigilance of government agents and authorities gave the Sioux an "opportunity to acquire firearms and munitions of war which they would not otherwise have been able to obtain."¹

The guns procured by the Indians were mostly muzzle-loading muskets, a few muzzle-loading rifles, and some revolvers. These were not the best arms of the day, but were as good as those available to many settlers in 1862. The experience of Thomas Galbraith, an official present at the beginning of the outbreak, was typical of the times. Galbraith and his group of about fifty whites and mixed bloods occupied a small arsenal near New Ulm, Minnesota. The whites found "fifty muskets [not rifles] belonging to the state of Minnesota

¹ Nelson A. Miles, Personal Recollections and Adventures of General Nelson A. Miles (Chicago: The Werner Co., 1897), 136.

. . . [they] also obtained some powder, lead and buckshot, and immediately all hands set to work to put the muskets in order and to make cartridges."²

The Sioux had many firearms, a good supply of ammunition, and in several actions with the troops severely mauled them.³ The Indians did not have as many guns, nor were they of as good a quality as those of the troops who finally defeated them, yet they were on the whole better armed than any Indians the army had fought in many years.

The seriousness of the Sioux troubles led to the sending of General Alfred Sully and about one thousand troops to Minnesota in the late summer of 1863. These were United States troops, and were much better armed than the companies of volunteers and militia who had faced the Sioux in 1862. Furthermore, Sully's men were mostly cavalry, which branch of the army had been largely equipped with breech-loading and repeating carbines and .44 calibre Colt or Remington percussion revolvers. The expedition also included artillery, one of the most potent weapons available for use against Indians. The actual value of artillery was not great, but the fear that Indians had of cannon was such as to make artillery a valuable addition to any Indian fighting expedition.

The battle that broke the power of the hostiles was fought September 3, 1863:

As an example of the "old style" of Indian fighting I give the battle of White Stone Hill, between United States forces, about one thousand strong, . . . and a combination of Sioux and Blackfeet, numbering not less than twelve or fifteen hundred warriors.⁴

² Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1863 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 4.

³ Ibid., 17.

⁴ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 475.

The cannon began to shell the Indian position and the cavalry charged the demoralized Indians. Every soldier was left to his own designs as the fight progressed far into the night. The Indian losses were heavy, about one hundred killed, many captured, and all their supplies destroyed.⁵

This battle, is on a grand scale, a most admirable exemplification of the usual mode and general results of Indian fights in the "good old days" when troops were armed with rifle and revolver, the Indians with bows or old smooth-bore muskets.⁶

In 1867, the Commissioner for Indian Affairs commented that the "feast of grape and canister which General Sully gave them at White Stone Hill has continued to exercise a powerful influence,"⁷ on many of the Sioux and Blackfeet, and especially on the Yanktonais Sioux who were most severely chastised. The foregoing is a good example of the judicious use of artillery against Indians.

The complete defeat of the Minnesota Sioux served to keep the Indian frontier fairly quiet for the succeeding two years. Relatively few settlers migrated to the frontier in this period because of the Civil War, and those that did venture into Indian lands were mostly miners and prospectors. The Indians did not at first bother the miners, because the miner did not appropriate large tracts of land, drive the game away, or settle in those areas occupied by the most warlike and hostile tribes. Later, the Indians realized the miners were soon followed by the army and by settlers interested in taking up land, and as a result fought to keep them out of Indian territory as well.

Several years of war had, by 1864, brought the issue of equipping the

⁵ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 476.

⁶ Ibid., 477.

⁷ Annual Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1867 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1867), 231.

army with breech-loading small arms to major importance. Several types of improved arms had been used during the war with varying degrees of success. The Secretary of War indicated in his annual report for 1864, that, "The introduction of breech-loading arms for the military service generally is recommended."⁸ At the time, the cavalry were generally furnished with breech-loading carbines. The intention of the army was to have the infantry as well armed as the cavalry, but the matter of expense entered into any such consideration, and the idea of finding a cheap way to convert the thousands of muzzle-loading rifle-muskets was uppermost, due to the desire for economy. Tests of the various types of breech-loading arms were conducted, and the testing board was supposed to make recommendations as to the best type of arms submitted.⁹ Little was done toward equipping the entire army with breech-loading small arms while the Civil War was still being fought, but almost all the leaders of the army were convinced by the end of the War that the change from muzzle-loading to breech-loading arms must be made.

The end of the Civil War saw the armies of the United States still largely supplied with muzzle-loading muskets. These volunteer troops were rapidly demobilized, and because the change from muzzle-loading to breech-loading arms was already decided upon, "The disbanded armies were allowed to take home their arms at a nominal price."¹⁰ Thousands of the best pattern muzzle-loading rifles were thus sold by the government at the end of the Civil War. Large concerns grew up over-night buying and selling war surplus arms and

⁸ House Executive Document No. 3, Part ii, 38 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1864] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865), I, 6.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ House Executive Document No. I, 39 Cong., Report of the Secretary of War [1865] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), I, ii.

material. Indian traders soon acquired large stocks of .54 calibre "Yager" rifles, .58 calibre Springfield rifles, .577 calibre Enfield rifles, and quantities of older model muzzle-loaders that had been pressed into service due to the needs of a rapidly expanding army. In addition to the sale of arms used by the Federal forces, the arms captured by them from the Confederate troops were also sold. These captured arms were usually sold for their weight in scrap metal, and were supposed to be broken up by the purchaser. Needless to say, the value of the arms as such often led the buyer to resell them at a considerable profit, and many of these weapons eventually found their way to the frontier where a still higher profit was made selling them to Indians. By the last months of 1865, many Indians had procured good arms. In October, 1865, a band of Snake Indians went on the warpath in Oregon. "The Indians were all well mounted and armed, and the settlers were obliged to abandon their farms."¹¹

While the victorious Union armies were disbanding, plans were slowly progressing toward the adoption of a breech-loading rifle for the army. No more muzzle-loading rifle muskets were being assembled at the armories, and the Chief of Ordnance reported that "A plan for the altering of the muzzle-loading musket into efficient breech-loaders has been devised by the master armorer at Springfield Armory, which appears to be superior to any others that I have seen."¹² It was directed that five thousand rifle-muskets be altered according to this plan and issued to the troops for trial. The master armorer mentioned was Erskine S. Allin; he had developed his system of altering the Springfield rifle musket while an employee of the Springfield armory, and thus

¹¹ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 95.

¹² Report of the Secretary of War [1865], II, ii.

would not have to be paid a royalty for the use of his patent. This was an important consideration, as the reduction of funds for the army after the Civil War ended made economy necessary, and Allin's alteration was certainly one of the cheapest to effect.¹³

Since the Allin system was retained in use by the United States army until 1892, it will be discussed in some detail. The system was first of all basically an alteration, not a complete departure from the muzzle-loading rifle musket. It consisted of a hinged breech-block secured to the top of the barrel, immediately behind the rear sight, that fitted into the space left when the top half section of the barrel was cut off. The firing pin was a long metal pin extending from the face of the breech-block through the block and exposed to the contact of the hammer at the rear of the breech mechanism. The original side lock of the rifle-musket was retained and the hammer made to strike against the firing pin instead of on the nipple of the old percussion arms. The breech mechanism was the only new addition to the Springfield rifle-musket necessary to transform it into an effective breech-loading rifle. The advantages resulting from the alteration were many. Soldiers armed with the new rifles could reload in any position and with a minimum need for movement that would expose them to enemy fire. The ammunition was not subject to being spoiled by wet or even damp weather as in the case of the paper cartridges used in the rifle-musket, and almost no cartridges would be ruined by breakage. No percussion caps were needed for the new cartridges, which relieved the soldier of having to carry a supply of these articles and cut the problem of supply considerably. Second only to the speed with which the breech-loader could be fired, was the increased accuracy and velocity obtained by insuring a positive

¹³ Arcadi Gluckman, United States Muskets, Rifles and Carbines (Buffalo, N. Y.: Otto Ulbrich Co., Inc., 1948), 275.

fit of the bullet in the rifling of the barrel. Breech-loading ammunition was made so that the bullet was slightly larger than the bore of the rifle so that it would get the full benefit of the rifling. This was a haphazard fit in the older muzzle-loading arms, as the expansion of the hollow bullet was not always satisfactory, and inadequate fitting of the bullet in the rifling resulted in decreased accuracy and loss of velocity.

The altered muskets of 1865 were .58 calibre, the same as the muzzle-loading type, and the cartridges carried the priming charge around the rim of the copper cartridges as in the .22 calibre cartridges still manufactured. Succeeding models of this altered rifle-musket incorporated numerous changes, but the arm essentially remained the same for the next twenty-seven years. The operation of the arms was still that of a single shot breech-loader; the soldier lifted the breech-block, which effected the ejection of the empty cartridge, inserted one cartridge, closed the breech, cocked the large side hammer, and was then ready to fire.

The altered rifle-muskets just discussed were intended for infantry use. By 1865, the cavalry had been equipped with breech-loading carbines, most of which used metallic ammunition and were repeaters capable of being fired several times without recharging the magazine. Colt and Remington .44 calibre percussion revolvers were also standard issue for cavalry, and the combination of carbine and revolver supplied the increased fire power that made cavalry a far more formidable enemy for the Indian than the infantry who were still armed with the muzzle-loading rifle-musket while the change to breech-loaders was being implemented. No breech-loading altered rifles were used against hostile Indians until the summer of 1867, and many infantrymen were not issued the new arms until late in 1869.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters (New York: The McClure Company, 1904), 66.

Thousands of privately manufactured breech-loading and repeating carbines had been purchased by the Federal and state governments to equip the troops they put in the field during the Civil War. The Maynard carbine which was the first to use a metallic cartridge successfully, the Sharps carbine with its linen wrapped ammunition, and several other types of breech-loading carbines which employed the old style percussion cap to ignite the powder charge in the cartridge were used by many regiments of Union cavalry. Spencer and Henry carbines and rifles were the best breech-loading, repeating arms of the day, and were so popular that some troops offered to pay for their own arms if given permission to equip themselves with these fine weapons.¹⁵ The Spencer arm was made in both carbine and rifle sizes, the only difference being in barrel length. This seven shot breech-loading repeater was the invention of C. M. Spencer, who had patented it in 1860. The arm used a 56/50 calibre rim fire metallic cartridge, and was loaded through an aperture in the butt plate by inserting a metal tube containing seven cartridges. The operator had only to work the finger lever, which doubled as trigger guard, to eject the empty shell and introduce a fresh cartridge into the firing chamber, then cock the hammer on the side of the lock to fire each of the seven shots. Later models of the Spencer had the calibre reduced to .50, and a magazine cut-off added to enable the soldier to use the arm as a single loader and conserve his extra fire power for the final charge or repulse of an attacking force.

The Henry repeating rifle was invented by Tyler Henry, who sold his patent to Oliver Winchester, an industrialist. Many troops were armed with the Henry rifle during the Civil War, and the publicity it received from this use added greatly to its popularity among the post-Civil War frontiersmen. Henry's

¹⁵ Francis Bannerman Sons, Arms and Military Goods Catalog, 1942 (New York: Francis Bannerman Sons, 1942), 265.

rifle was the forerunner of the Winchester lever action rifles of 1866, 1873, and 1876. A long tubular magazine located under the barrel held the cartridges and spring that pushed the cartridges constantly toward the breech. A finger lever and trigger guard were combined, and when pushed down and forward effected the ejection of the empty shell and placed a loaded cartridge in the chamber. The hammer was automatically cocked by the movement of a slide worked by action of the finger lever. The magazine held fifteen cartridges and could be emptied at an enemy in ten seconds.¹⁶ The main difference between the Henry rifle and the Winchesters that followed it was that the magazine was loaded at the muzzle end, the spring withdrawn before the cartridges were inserted and replaced when the fifteen rounds had been loaded. This meant that the arm had to be partially disassembled for loading. The Winchester rifles were loaded through an aperture, covered by a spring, at the right side of the breech mechanism.

The Henry and Spencer arms have been covered here in some detail, because they became very popular on the frontier after the Civil War, and many Indians were able to acquire these weapons from traders. Both arms were highly regarded by army men of the 1860's. The Spencer was often recommended for general issue to the army, and the Winchester became the most used civilian arm on the frontier. Spencer arms were not produced after 1869, as the firm was purchased by the Winchester people to eliminate the effective competition of the Spencer rifles and carbines. These arms were at all times available to civilian buyers, and finally became the chief stock in trade of many shady Indian traders and frontier hardware dealers. The Indian was an excellent judge of weapons, and was quick to recognize the value of these improved rifles and carbines.

¹⁶ H. W. S. Cleveland, Hints to Riflemen (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1864), 173.

Indian troubles had been fairly few during 1864 and early 1865, but tension was mounting, and those who were best informed realized that war with the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Kiowa, Ute and other powerful tribes was liable to break out at any time. The Powder River expedition of 1865, that was intended to open roads to Montana, encountered the warlike Cheyenne Indians who were fairly well supplied with guns, probably muzzle-loaders.¹⁷ In an action with the Indians, two thousand troops were forced to withdraw in the face of the hostiles.¹⁸ The troops were armed with a few carbines and the Springfield muzzle-loading rifle-musket, as the breech-loading converted Springfields had not yet been produced in quantity for issue to troops. The results of the campaign were negative. Only the Indians gained by the acquisition of many "good carbines which they took from soldiers."¹⁹

The Secretary of War reported in 1866 that the chief operations of the War Department during that year had been confined to "testing the various improvements of breech-loading small arms, and supplying them to the army."²⁰

The Secretary went on to say:

The importance of speedily providing the army with breech-loading small arms of the best pattern has been recognized and acted upon This board [convened to test various breech-loaders] met March 10, and continued until June 4, when its report was submitted, and directions given to the ordnance department for the speedy manufacture of breech-loading arms It has been deemed advisable to convert Springfield rifle-muskets, at a comparatively small cost, into efficient breech-loaders The department has already on hand breech-loaders of approved pattern adequate for the supply of the cavalry, and mounted and light infantry.²¹

¹⁷ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 126.

¹⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹⁹ Ibid., 132.

²⁰ House Executive Document No. I, 39 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1866] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 1.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

This report was misleading in several ways. In the first place the recommendation of the board convened to test the different arms offered placed the Allin altered rifle fourth on the list of arms, and stated that "the Spencer magazine carbine is the best service gun of this kind yet offered."²² The board further recommended that, "no single-loading carbine should be constructed for the army."²³ The statement that enough improved arms were available to arm the branches of the army named in the last part of the report cited was true as concerned arms in storage; however, most of the troops were still armed with the same arms they had carried during the Civil War, and action reports and other sources indicate that many troops were using the old muzzle-loaders long after November 14, 1866, the date the Annual Report of the Secretary of War was submitted. Large numbers of improved arms were listed in this report, but few were in use by troops. 94,196 Spencer Carbines, 1,731 Henry rifles, and 12,471 Spencer rifles were included in the list of arms on hand.²⁴ In view of the supply of improved arms, one wonders why troops on the frontier were still fighting Indians with the old percussion rifles. Official inertia seems to be the only adequate answer to this question.

Indian troubles flared up almost as soon as the Civil War was over. The stream of settlers passing through and into the plains country was enough to rekindle the smouldering fire of Indian war. Obstacles to settlement in the plains region have often been discussed by historians. Lack of water, the dearth of trees for lumber, often severe climactic conditions, and the need for new agricultural methods are usually pointed out as delaying factors. One

²² House Executive Document No. I, 39 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War / 1866 / (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 679.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 663 - 664.

very obvious point is generally overlooked or passed over with a short paragraph; that factor was the several thousand armed Indians who roamed over this region impeding settlement by their hostile occupation of the plains country.

In 1866, the alteration of Springfield rifle-muskets to breech-loaders was modified from the type of 1865 by reducing the calibre to .50 and changing the firing pin to handle the new center fire cartridges. The reduction in calibre was accomplished by reaming the .58 calibre barrel to about .65 and inserting a rifled tube of .50 calibre, which was brazed to the original barrel. By November of 1866, only 5,000 arms had been altered, and the main arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts was still retooling to effect the alteration of large numbers of the new arms.²⁵

The army on the frontier was ordered, in 1866, to establish a line of posts to protect the wagon routes into Dakota and Montana territories. Poorly armed, under strength regiments and companies carried out this order, and a series of posts were precariously established where ordered. Meanwhile, more and more Indians were obtaining guns, the imperative need for improved army weapons was receiving scant attention, and the once powerful Union army was being rapidly disbanded and large units of it immobilized on reconstruction duty in the South.

Indian depredations were increasing in all sections of the frontier, and although most of the tribes were still using their native weapons and obsolete guns, the trend toward the use of the white man's rifle and revolver was growing. Reports from officers operating against hostile Indians increasingly pointed out that the Indians were obtaining more and more of the better type firearms. A fight with hostiles in Oregon netted the troops "19 horses, a few

²⁵ Report of the Secretary of War [1866], 655.

rifles, 15 pounds of powder, and 20 pounds of balls."²⁶ The officer in charge reported that the contest was close and ended in victory for the troops only after cannon had been used to dislodge the Indians from their positions.²⁷ The troops involved were armed with the .58 calibre rifle-musket.²⁸ Contraband traders were supplying hostile Indians with ammunition and whiskey in many areas of the frontier, and measures to control this trade were urged by both the army and the Indian Bureau.²⁹ Many Indians were still using the bow and arrow, but the increase in the number of guns encountered in the hands of hostiles was very noticeable.³⁰

Not only did the army have to contend with Indians who procured arms through illegal trade, but they were also confronted with hostiles whose arms were furnished them by the Indian Bureau. This was a sore point with the army, and one that continued to rankle for many years. One Indian Agent in New Mexico feared that there might be trouble around the agency. His method of handling the situation was to give the Utes "75 pounds of powder, two hundred pounds of lead, ten thousand percussion caps . . . [he then told them] to go off on a hunt and stay as long as they can gain a subsistence."³¹ This appears the height of irresponsibility. The idea of having the Indians concentrated around the agencies was to avoid clashes with the whites. This agent not only encouraged their leaving, but furnished them with ammunition as readily

²⁶ Report of the Secretary of War [1866], 38.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 39.

²⁹ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1866 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 151.

³⁰ Ibid., 161.

³¹ Ibid., 151.

usable on soldiers or settlers as game. Governor Thomas F. Meagher of Montana wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in April, 1866, protesting the issuance of arms and ammunition to Indians. Meagher pointed out that the agent for the Blackfeet had, "distributed pistols and ammunition last November [to Piegan Indians], the same that are now on the warpath."³² The pistols mentioned were surplus Colt and Remington revolvers, and were identical with those used by the cavalry, which relied heavily on this arm to give it superiority over the Indians. Why the hand guns were issued is not clear. As they are not good hunting arms, the only reasonable answer is that the arms were demanded by the Indians and their demands were granted in the hope that they would thus be bribed into remaining peaceful. The army's views on the subject were exactly opposite to those of the Indian Bureau. Their answer was that, "The Indian should be deprived of his arms and horses," and thus rendered harmless.³³ The government apparently took little heed of the need to control the supply of arms available to Indians, and in July, 1866, yielded to the wishes of interested parties by passing a law "allowing any loyal citizen, of proper character, to trade with Indian tribes."³⁴

Officers on the frontier were much concerned with the need for better arms, and many armed themselves with the Henry rifles at their own expense. The troops were armed with a few Spencer carbines (cavalry), percussion revolvers, and a large number of .58 calibre Springfield muzzle-loading rifle-muskets.³⁵ Colonel Henry B. Carrington, builder of one of the new posts

³² Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1866, 199.

³³ House Executive Document No. 1, Part 2, 41 Cong., 3 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1870] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1870), I, 22.

³⁴ Annual Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 6.

³⁵ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 39.

(Ft. Phil. Kearney in Dakota Territory), repeatedly asked the War Department for breech-loading arms and more ammunition in the summer of 1866.³⁶ General Steel, commanding the Department of the Columbia, echoed the same sentiments in his report for 1866. He listed the actions against hostile Indians in his department for the year, and in connection with a fight with Snake Indians in November, 1866, indicated that the hostiles had a considerable amount of ammunition, and that, "A greater number of Indians [most of whom escaped] would have been killed had this command been better equipped, having nothing but Springfield rifles [muzzle-loaders]. Their use was wholly unservicable mounted."³⁷ General Steel's report also indicated an awareness that the Indians were procuring more and better arms. In December, 1866, nineteen Spencer-armed cavalrymen fought a party of fourteen Snake warriors and killed all of the hostiles after a hard fight. "The sergeant reported the Indians well armed [not usual up to this time] with sporting rifles, Yagers [.54 calibre, model 1842 muzzle-loading army rifles], Colt's pistols, and bows and arrows."³⁸

The last days of 1866 brought near disaster to Colonel Carrington's command at Fort Phil. Kearny. The Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians who occupied the surrounding country were eager to drive the soldiers from their lands, and literally laid siege to the fort for many months. The troops holding the post were mostly infantry, and were armed with the .58 calibre rifle-musket of Civil War vintage. R. J. Smyth, a civilian teamster at the fort in 1866-1867, included his opinion of the .58 Springfield rifle-musket in a letter to Cyrus Townsend Brady, author of Indian Fights and Fighters, saying:

I remember a soldier named Pete Smith . . . this man was mounted.
He rode too far ahead of the outfit, the Indians cut him off . . .

³⁶ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 39.

³⁷ House Executive Document No. 1, Part 1., 40 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1867] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1867), I, 81.

³⁸ Ibid., 80.

The Sioux caught him, skinned him alive. This man was an old volunteer soldier, but what show has a man with the old fashioned Springfield musket? One shot and you are done.³⁹

As Smyth indicated, one shot was all that was possible with the muzzle-loading rifle-musket in the rush of Indian fighting. Just before Christmas, 1866, Captain William Fetterman and eighty of his men accompanied a wood cutting party from the fort. These men were armed mostly with the .58 calibre rifle-musket, some Spencer carbines, their officers had percussion Colt revolvers, and two civilians who went along for the ride carried the fifteen-shot Henry repeating rifle. Fetterman was anxious to carry out his boast that he could ride through the entire Sioux nation with a company of regulars, and when a decoy group of Red Cloud's warriors appeared on a hill, Fetterman ordered his command to charge. This was probably the last order this officer ever issued. Red Cloud had at least a thousand Indians waiting for the troops on the other side of the hill. The Indians waited until the soldiers' guns were empty and in the slow process of being reloaded, then they rushed the troops before their guns were loaded and killed all of them. "Fetterman and sixty-five others [were later found] lying in a square hardly forty feet square."⁴⁰ Whether or not troops equipped entirely with breech-loaders could have successfully defended themselves is, of course, open to debate; however, less than half the same number of troops defeated the same Indians the following year, and these soldiers were using the .50 calibre, model 1866 Springfield rifle. The latter action will be discussed later in this chapter.

The year 1867 opened with little change in the frontier conditions or the policies of the army. "The Report of the Chief of Ordnance," for 1867,

³⁹ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 63-64.

⁴⁰ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 149.

indicated that improvements and changes had been made on the Allin system of altering the muzzle-loading rifle-muskets, and that most of them had been issued to troops in the departments of the Platte and the Missouri.⁴¹ This may seem a small change, yet it was the first time that large numbers of troops had been so equipped, and the use of the new arms in battle soon brought great changes in the tactics of Indian warfare and the conduct of the Indian campaigns.

In addition to the new breech-loading arms, the army also purchased fifty .50 calibre Gatling guns and fifty 1. calibre Gatling guns.⁴² These new guns were not apparently in use on the frontier for some time, as no record of their use appeared for some time after their purchase. The Gatling gun was invented by George Gatling of Chicago, and had been offered to the Federal army during the Civil War. It was not considered efficient at the time, largely due to its reliance on paper wrapped ammunition that was very susceptible to breakage or unwanted explosions. The development and adoption of the .50 center fire metallic cartridge by the army furnished the type of ammunition needed for the Gatling gun, and the army's first rapid fire or machine gun was placed in service. The gun consisted of ten barrels mounted around a central axis and operated by turning a hand crank at the breech, which caused the barrels to revolve around the axis. Each complete revolution of the crank brought each of the ten barrels in line with the stationary breech, which caused the bottom barrel to fire and the top one to eject the empty shell as the mechanism was operated. The ammunition was introduced at the top by means of a gravity feed magazine, and the only limitations on firing, theoretically, were the ability

⁴¹ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 609.

⁴² James E. Hicks, What the Citizen Should Know About Our Weapons (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1941), 104.

of the operator to turn the crank rapidly and the speed with which the loader ✓ replaced the empty magazines. Thus, if the operator could revolve the mechanism one hundred times a minute and the loader keep the supply of cartridges constant, the gun could deliver one thousand bullets a minute. The Gatling gun was long considered an artillery weapon, and was usually mounted on a light field artillery carriage. After its value in repulsing Indian charges and as an offensive weapon for use with infantry was understood, it played an ever increasing role in Indian warfare. In 1867, however, it was still considered a more or less experimental weapon.

The Indian troubles of 1866 were still present in 1867. Sioux war parties dominated the northern plains area, and held the frontier paralyzed. Government peace commissioners were sent to arrange a treaty with the Sioux and other hostile tribes. These commissioners were bent on securing peace at any price, and were even willing to give the hostiles arms and ammunition in return ✓ for the signing of what the Indians considered a scrap of paper. "When a Sioux was told that if he touched the pen he would receive so many guns, so many pounds of powder and lead . . . it was bribery."⁴³ The records of the meeting of the peace commission with the Indians who had massacred Fetterman's command the winter before, which took place June 12, 1867, are confusing and contradictory. The report of the Acting Commissioner for Indian Affairs stated that "They [the Indians] expressed great anxiety to get powder from the Commissioners, but it was refused."⁴⁴ The Acting Commissioner further admitted that, "the only object the Indians had in meeting the Commissioners was to obtain powder and lead with which to continue and wage a more vigorous war."⁴⁵

⁴³ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 152.

⁴⁴ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 269-270.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

General Winfield Scott Hancock claimed, "that the Peace Policy Agents were handing out government arms and ammunition to Indians who were using these weapons to kill the government's citizens."⁴⁶ Agent Partick of the Upper Platte Agency reported that he gave the Cheyennes presents and provisions for hunting (ammunition), and that "I since learned that they did not keep the treaty, but are now hostile."⁴⁷ Small wonder, considering that the Cheyennes were the greatest friends and allies of the Sioux, and had also been present when the Fettermen massacre occurred. Even the Sioux were allowed to trade at the government trading posts in an effort to win their friendship, but, "Having traded for arms and ammunition they brushed aside all talk of peace and abruptly departed for the hostile camp."⁴⁸ No wonder General William T. Sherman wrote to the Secretary of War saying: "I would like to have some power to prevent the Indians with whom we are now at war . . . from being supplied (as was done last fall) with the very arms and munitions with which they have fought us."⁴⁹ Sherman wrote this letter in July, 1867, at which time the Sioux and Cheyennes were being given arms by the Peace Policy Agents in an attempt to buy peace.

Even before the special peace commissioners met with the hostiles, the Sioux had once again commenced attacks on settlers and army posts. On June 4, 1867, a party of Sioux raided Fort Randall, Dakota Territory, and drove off most of the garrison's horses. The official report indicated that, "a portion of them were armed with firearms,"⁵⁰ which shows an increasing importance placed

⁴⁶ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 155.

⁴⁷ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 289.

⁴⁸ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 153-154.

⁴⁹ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 67.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 48.

on the arms available to Indians, as reports concerning action against poorly armed Indians usually took this for granted as it had almost always been the case prior to the post-Civil War period.

While the Peace Policy Agents were giving arms to the Indians they were to secure treaties from, and the army was begging for some control over the supplies available to hostile Indians, many Indian agents were pursuing a course of business as usual and doleing out powder and lead to their charges. The Sissiton and Wahpeton Sioux were given some ammunition by their agent, which was supposed to be used for hunting.⁵¹ Upon being ordered to suspend issuance of powder and lead the agent at Fort Berthold, Dakota Territory, wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs asking for permission to sell ammunition to the Arickarees, saying: "There is no danger that people as hungry and poor as they will invest in large quantities of ammunition."⁵² This agent may have been correct; however, past experience seemed to show that much of the supplies so obtained eventually found their way to the camps of hostile Indians. Several agents reported that they were sure that the hostile Sioux ✓ were being well supplied with arms and ammunition by traders from Canada. Agent Campbell at Yankton, Dakota Territory, reported that the Red River traders, whom were mostly half-breeds from north of the Canadian border, were furnishing the Sioux with all the powder and lead they could pay for.⁵³ The hostiles in the northern plains were fast obtaining arms as good as those used by the bulk of the army up to this time, but the introduction of a new factor into the warfare between the soldiers and the Indians was yet to indicate its significance.

⁵¹ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 245.

⁵² Ibid., 237.

⁵³ Ibid., 240.

That factor was the issuing of breech-loading rifles using metallic ammunition to most of the troops serving on the northern frontier. ✓

Fort Phil. Kearny, site of the massacre of Fettermen's command, was still in a state of semi-siege in the summer of 1867. The irreconcilable Red Cloud and his fifteen hundred warriors constantly harrassed the post and waited for another opportunity to attack the soldiers away from the protection of the fort. Unknown to the hostiles, the new .50 calibre breech-loading Springfield rifles had been issued to the troops of this command, but the Indians did not have long to wait to learn what the significance this change in the equipment of the soldiers was to have. On July 31, 1867, Captain James Powell left the fort with a small detail of soldiers to act as escorts for a wood cutting detail on near-by Piney Island. Arriving at his destination, Powell had the boxes of the wagons removed from the running gear and placed in a circle as a defensive measure. The wood cutters were set to work, and the soldiers ordered to keep a sharp watch for Indians. A party of about two hundred Indians attacked the whites almost at once. Powell ordered all his men to take cover behind the loop-holed[?] wagon boxes, distributed extra arms and ammunition, and told off men to act as loaders for the best marksmen. The men behind the wagon boxes were armed with a few Spencer magazine carbines, several percussion Colt revolvers, and the new breech-loading, .50 calibre Springfield rifles.⁵⁴ Red Cloud massed his oldest[?] warriors to form the first wave of attackers, expecting that many of them would fall in the first volley from what he supposed were the old muzzle-loading Springfield rifle-muskets. The second wave of prime Indian warriors was to ride over the soldiers while they were reloading. Red Cloud ordered the attack, the first wave of warriors dashed headlong against

⁵⁴ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 67.

the improvised shelter of the wagon boxes, and virtually disappeared beneath the guns of the whites. The second wave followed at once, but there was no slackening of fire from the small group of defenders, and they too were forced back. Time after time, the Sioux charged the circle of wagon boxes, often leaving their dead within a few feet of the whites. Many of these Indians had muzzle-loading arms, revolvers, and a few breech-loading rifles.⁵⁵ Powell's thirty-two men continued to hold off the fifteen hundred Sioux, and inflicted so many casualties⁽⁶⁾ that the Indians, "concluded that the white man had made some 'medicine guns' which would 'fire all the time' and that their best plan was to stop the conflict."⁵⁶ What a contrast this was to the Fetterman massacre of the previous winter. Fetterman had had more than twice the number of soldiers in Powell's command, but his men had been armed with muzzle-loading rifles. Powell's men were all equipped with breech-loaders, and were able to keep up such a volume of fire that the Indians were unable to ride over many as they had done with Fetterman. It was the arms that made the difference.

Even before this time the Indians had breech-loaders, but they had had no experience of the terrible destructive power of these weapons in the hands of cool and determined men protected by breastworks This may be called a "transition fight." The Indian was just emerging from his scarcely dangerous days of bows and muzzle-loaders.⁵⁷

The day of pitched battles in Indian warfare was fast drawing to a close. ✓ During the late 1860's the Indians learned that they could not hope to defeat soldiers armed with the new rifles except by strategem, surprise, or overwhelming numbers of warriors armed as well or better than the troops.

Indian troubles in 1867 were not confined to the northern plains area.

⁵⁵ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 67.

⁵⁶ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 486.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 489

Almost all of the hostile Indians were reported as being better armed than before, which no doubt partly explains their increased hostility. The Snake Indians in Oregon were still on the warpath, and were giving the army a good deal of trouble. Indians employed as scouts by the army were allowed to keep all the arms they captured from the hostiles.⁵⁸ This seems a rather short-sighted policy, as the friendly Indians of one year were often the hostiles of the next. As an example, Indian scouts operating in Oregon captured, "three horses, five rifles, three pounds of powder," and other supplies from Snake hostiles and were allowed to keep their plunder.⁵⁹

The Klamath Indians on the Smith River Reservation in northern California were on the verge of hostility, and the situation at the agency furnishes a good example of the state of preparedness found at most agencies. Special Commissioner Stevens reported:

I was forced to believe the doctor's apprehensions [concerning the Indians] well founded, and with this view, on my instance, we adjourned to the armory. There we found a miscellaneous collection of seven pieces, an Enfield, a Springfield, a Mississippi Yager, good arms, but so badly rusted as to be unfit for immediate use, the others all out of repair, no balls and no powder. We were in bad condition for a siege, our revolvers being the only weapons.⁶⁰

All of the arms mentioned by Steven were muzzle-loaders. In the rush of Indian fighting each might have been fired once, as there was usually no time to reload.

Not all Indians were well armed by 1867, as only those rich enough to pay the high trade prices or powerful enough to have their demands met by the Indian Bureau and treaty makers were able to acquire good arms. The Indians

⁵⁸ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 101.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 139.

in Utah were said to be poorly armed because they were too poor to buy guns.⁶¹ The Comanches in New Mexico had no such trouble, as their source of wealth lay in the horses and cattle stolen from ranchers. Mexican traders were always willing to supply arms in trade for stolen live stock. Superintendent Norton wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in his report for 1867, that Mexican traders were supplying the Comanches with revolvers, and that he wished that this trade might be speedily stopped.⁶²

In his report for 1867, General McDowell stated that the Indians in the District of the Upper Colorado were, "very active, and have become well armed."⁶³ A partial explanation for this is found in the report of Agent Oakes at the Middle Park Agency, Colorado. He reported that he issued ammunition to some of his charges for hunting purposes, and that he had furnished the Utes with good arms and a considerable amount of ammunition for the same purpose.⁶⁴ Apparently the supplies issued by Oakes were put to other than hunting uses by the Indians. These may very well have been the same Indians who were attacked by a detail of forty-five rifle-armed soldiers while hunting in the border area between Colorado and Arizona. The officer in charge reported that his men were able to capture the village, but forced to retreat because these Indians had at least twenty firearms.⁶⁵

The Apaches in Arizona were still poorly armed, probably because they were too poor to buy them. An action fought with them by cavalry troops in

⁶¹ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 176.

⁶² Ibid., 195.

⁶³ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 127.

⁶⁴ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 223.

⁶⁵ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 160.

April, 1867, was an example of the usual easy victory over the badly armed Apaches of the day. Many Indians were killed by the Spencer-armed troopers; no soldiers were lost; the captured goods of the Indians included only one gun, but many bows and arrows.⁶⁶ A similar fight and results were reported by another officer whose men fought thirty-five Apaches, killed twenty and also captured one gun and numbers of bows and arrows. These troops were also armed with the Spencer seven-shot repeating carbine.⁶⁷ The Apaches had few good guns in this period, and victories were not costly for the army.⁶⁸ However, if the agent for the Icarilla Apaches had his way this would not long be the case, as he reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that he wished to supply the Indians under his care with ammunition and arms--as usual, for hunting purposes.⁶⁹

Other Indians in Arizona, namely the warlike Haulapais, were better equipped than their Apache neighbors. Commenting on the Haulapais, General McDowell stated: "They [the Haulapais]. . . are armed with superior weapons which they well know how to use . . . they [the troops] would rather fight five Apaches than one Haulapais."⁷⁰ Certainly, the difference in the armament of the two tribes had a great deal to do with this preference. A confidential report of Major Roger Jones, following his inspection of troops serving in Arizona, was written to the adjutant general of the Middle Division of the Pacific, July 15, 1867. Major Jones recommended improvements to increase the

⁶⁶ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 127.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁶⁸ Colonel Thomas M. Anderson, "The Fourteenth Regiment of Infantry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 608.

⁶⁹ Report of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, 204.

⁷⁰ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 89.

efficiency of troops operating against the Indians:

Eight or ten companies of infantry mounted and armed with a carbine, preferably with Spencer's, would be ampleInfantry companies employed mainly on escort duty need a carbine and pistol. Men of the company at Camp Cady . . . have provided themselves with revolvers at their own expense.

The introduction of the Spencer carbine throughout the service will more than treble our effective strength.⁷¹

Other troops using the Spencer carbine, notably Custer's men were very successful in their operations against hostile tribes. In a fight with Red Cloud's Ogallala Sioux in Kansas, "the troops had such a great superiority in arms that the Indians could not act effectively."⁷² The change to Spencer carbines recommended by Major Jones was heavily influenced by what he saw on his tour of inspection. The infantry stationed at Richard's Mill, Arizona Territory, were found to be armed with the Springfield muskets, calibre .58, and Jones' report stated that they were unable to cope with the Indians in that district.⁷³ ✓ This was two years after the army had decided to replace the .58 calibre rifle-musket with a breech-loader using metallic ammunition.

All reports concerning the new .50 calibre breech-loading Springfield rifle were favorable. The report of General Auger, commanding the Department of the Platte, said:

The new breech-loading rifle (altered Springfield) issued this year to the troops in this department have increased their efficiency wonderfully. All reports concur in regarding this arm as nearly perfect for infantry, and the ammunition with it the best ever furnished to troops.⁷⁴

The Secretary of War reported in 1867 that all of the 23,083 altered rifles

⁷¹ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 81.

⁷² George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 155.

⁷³ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 99.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

had been issued to troops, "and nearly all of the infantry serving on the departments of the Missouri and the Platte have been armed with them These arms have done excellent service in an Indian campaign during the past summer."⁷⁵ What the report didn't say was that infantry serving in other areas of the frontier were still armed with the muzzle-loading rifle-muskets, and would continue to be so armed for some time.

While the army was improving the arms it issued to its soldiers, the Indians were also acquiring better firearms. Colonel Richard I. Dodge's descriptions of the plains Indians of late 1867 were not those of lance and bow armed warriors with tomahawk and club their most lethal close combat weapons. The following incident furnishes an excellent word picture of the metamorphosis of the plains Indian from a poorly armed warrior to one of the world's best light cavalrymen. Dodge and a Pawnee Indian were hunting one day in 1867; they were discovered by a band of forty to fifty hostile Sioux who immediately charged them. Dodge described the incident in these words:

About four miles back I had noticed a splendid defensive position here we dismounted and made our preparations for fight. The Pawnee positively refused to fight on foot, and when I was ready I found him ready also; not a rag of clothing on his body, and nothing but a bridle on his pony. From some receptacle he had fished out a lot of narrow red, blue, and white streamers which he had tied in his hair, and in the mane and tail of his horse, and which, as he moved streamed out for yards in the rear. Sitting perfectly naked, with unwonted ease and grace, on his barebacked horse, with fire in his eye, determination on his face, a Spencer carbine in one hand, the reins and a Colt's revolver in the other, he looked no mean ally in a fight for life.⁷⁶

The Sioux decided not to attack two such desperate and well armed men and drifted away after hanging around for several hours. Such an Indian as the one described was becoming an increasingly familiar sight on the frontier, and when

⁷⁵ Report of the Secretary of War [1867], 99.

⁷⁶ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 457.

reports indicated that certain Indians were well armed it was just such a type of warrior they had in mind, not one armed with the native bow and lance, or obsolete muzzle-loaders. The year 1867 ended with the Indian troubles still unsettled and the arms factor assuming greater importance as the hostile tribes gradually replaced their older weapons with the improved arms devised by the white man, mass produced through his industrial genius, and directly supplied by the Department of Indian Affairs and shady white traders.

An action between about sixty Indians and fifteen soldiers that took place in New Mexico Territory in January of 1868 furnishes an excellent illustration of the significance of the change in the weapons used by hostile Indians.

The Indians took to the rocks about ten yards from their houses. Here they fought desperately, being armed with about 40 breech-loading and 20 muzzle-loading arms. After a hard fight of one hour and a half . . . the command was successfully withdrawn to the horses.⁷⁷

Other Indians encountered by detachments of the same regiment were also "well armed" and able to force the troopers to "withdraw."⁷⁸ In the days before the Indian procured improved firearms, the better armed soldiers would probably have routed several times their own number of Indians, but, as the report stated, the possession by the Indians of so many good guns dictated a prudent retreat on the part of the troops.

The Kiowas of the southern plains region were also out on the warpath in 1868. A letter written by Custer described a band of these Kiowas his command encountered as being, "painted and plumed for war, and nearly all were armed with one rifle, two (2) revolvers, bow and arrow and lance."⁷⁹ Custer's

⁷⁷ Lieutenant Charles M. O'Conner, "The Eighth Regiment of Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 277.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Papers of the Generals W. T. Sherman and P. H. Sheridan, Collection on File in the Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Copied by or under the direction of Professor C. C. Rister, University of Oklahoma, 103.

reports usually considered the armament of the hostiles, and while the older weapons were much in evidence in this case, he was quick to notice that most of the Indians carried rifles (not old muskets) and revolvers as well.

Governor Hall of Colorado sent a telegram to General Sherman, September 24, 1863, asking for troops to cope with increasing Indian hostilities. Hall's request stated:

. . . it is impossible to drive them [the hostile Indians] out and protect the families at the same time, for they [the Indians] are better armed, mounted, disciplined, and better officered than are our men.⁸⁰

Undoubtedly, many of these Indians had obtained the Spencer, Henry, and Winchester magazine rifles and carbines, as well as many of the Remington, Sharp, and Springfield carbines and rifles. The army at this time was still armed with the Springfield muzzle-loading rifle-musket and the newer .50 calibre altered Springfield breech-loaders; neither of these infantry weapons was any match for the magazine rifles and carbines procured by many Indians.

The most serious Indian warfare of 1863 took place in the central and northern plains. The Sioux were still on the warpath, and the famous war chief Roman Nose was leading the powerful Cheyennes on a series of devastating raids against settlements in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. Special companies of scouts and plainsmen were organized in September, 1863, to combat the Cheyennes. The scouts were officered and equipped by the army. The arms issued to them were given special consideration, as the units were to be the last word in equipment and organization.

They were equipped with saddle, bridle, haversack, canteen, blanket, knife, tin cup, Spencer repeating rifle, good for seven shots without reloading, six in the magazine, one in the barrel, and a

⁸⁰ Papers of the Generals W. T. Sherman and P. H. Sheridan, 103.

heavy Colt's army revolver [percussion type as used in the Civil War].⁸¹

The scouts were suddenly attacked by overwhelming numbers of Cheyennes on the Arikaree fork of the Republican River. Major George Forsyth, commander of the scouts, ordered them to take up position for defense on a small island in the river. This island was later named Beecher's Island in honor of Lieutenant Beecher, an officer in the scouts, who was mortally wounded in the first Indian attack. The scouts were all seasoned Indian fighters and realized at once their position. Rifle pits were dug, and the entire command made ready to withstand the attack they knew was sure to come. Many of the Cheyennes had traded or captured rifles in this fight.⁸² Hundreds of Cheyenne warriors charged the scouts' position, "Roman Nose leading the advance shaking his heavy Spencer rifle."⁸³ The Indians charged in such numbers and so heavily that the troops were only able to turn the Cheyennes back on the sixth continuous volley from their Spencers.⁸⁴ It was lucky for the scouts that their officers had stipulated they be armed with the Spencer weapons - no similar body of men using the single-shot Springfield breech-loader of the muzzle-loading rifle-musket could have so defended themselves. Largely because of their repeating arms, the scouts were able to hold their position on the river island until more troops arrived and caused the Cheyennes to withdraw, leaving many dead on the scene of action but carrying away more, including their chief Roman Nose.

⁸¹ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 76 [Spencer arms had seven shot magazines, not six as in the quoted material].

⁸² Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 70.

⁸³ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 86.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 87.

Sporadic fighting between bands of the Kiowas, Arapahoes, Comanches and Cheyennes continued throughout the months of September and October, 1868. The power of these Indians was considerable, and General Philip H. Sheridan estimated that as a whole they numbered, "6,000 well mounted and well armed warriors."⁸⁵ Captain Louis H. Carpenter of the Tenth Cavalry wrote a description of the Beaver Island fight which was printed in Brady's Indian Fights and Fighters. Two troops of Carpenter's regiment of Negro cavalry were attacked by about five hundred hostile Indians on October 14, 1868. The troops were deployed in front of the wagons they accompanied, and prepared to repel the attackers. Carpenter related that as soon as the hostiles came within effective rifle range, "A fire commenced from our seven-shooter Spencers which sounded like the fire of a line of infantry."⁸⁶ This statement was meant to indicate that the two troops of Spencer armed cavalry could set up a volume of fire equal to that produced by an entire regiment of infantry armed with single-shot rifles. Another army writer described this same fight, telling of the Indian attack and the value of the Spencer carbines in these words:

Then followed a volley of Spencers which drove the Indians back as though they were thrown from a cannon The Indians were so demoralized by these results that they did not renew the attack.⁸⁷

Many of these Indians also had good firearms, but they did not understand the use of such arms for repelling attacking bodies by controlled volley fire that could be made continuous with such repeating arms as the Spencer carbine and rifle. They were not long in learning this lesson though, and when they had

⁸⁵ House Executive Document No. I, 40 Cong., 3 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1868] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1868), 17.

⁸⁶ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 132.

⁸⁷ Lieutenant John Bigelow, Jr., "The Tenth Regiment of Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 292.

the era of pitched battles and mass Indian attacks was over. Only when firm in the knowledge of having completely overwhelming numbers would the Indians consent to a stand and fight strategy in battle.

Even though defeated in several fights in 1868, the plains tribes were not crushed in battle by the army. The army was in pitifully small force to cope with the now better armed hostiles, and could not hope to catch and defeat the wandering Indians. Only by striking the hostiles after they had gone into permanent winter camp could the army expect to crush the power of such tribes as the Cheyenne. To this end, Custer struck the winter camp of the important Southern Cheyenne tribe on the Washita River, in western Oklahoma, late in November of 1868. Custer took the Cheyennes completely by surprise. The troopers killed one hundred and three Indians and burned a large part of their camp and stores. Many more Cheyennes escaped and soon were pressing the soldiers hard. About eighteen cavalrymen charged up a small valley and were surrounded and killed by the hostiles. Custer saw the danger and ordered the soldiers to retreat. Had they stayed to fight, there is a good chance that none of them would have escaped. The Cheyennes were well armed and excellent fighters. Custer reported to General Sheridan that his command had captured

. . . thirty-five (35) revolvers; forty-seven (47) rifles; five hundred thirty-five (535) pounds of powder; one thousand fifty pounds of lead; four thousand (4,000) arrows and arrow heads; seventy-five (75) spears; ninety bullet moulds; thirty-five bows and quivers; twelve shields; three hundred pounds (300) of bullets.⁸⁸

The arms captured indicated that these Indians were well armed and had plenty of ammunition.⁸⁹ No muskets were included, and a considerable number of

⁸⁸ Papers of the Generals W. T. Sherman and P. H. Sheridan, 63.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 66.

revolvers and rifles were. Considering the firearms captured were the property of the one hundred and three Indians killed, it is not unreasonable to assume that the bulk of the tribe that made good their escape from the initial charge of the troops were as well equipped as their fallen fellows.

The procurement of arms and ammunition by hostile Indians continued all through the troubles of 1868. In the spring, the Ogallala Sioux came in to the agencies to talk peace. Once the presents, arms and ammunition had been received, all talk of peace ended and Red Cloud led them back to the warpath.⁹⁰ The agent for the Southern Cheyennes issued arms and ammunition, "without knowing that the Indians had commenced hostilities."⁹¹ This agent was either a liar or a total incompetent, as his job was to know what the Indians were up to, where they were, and above all to try and keep them peaceful. These were the same Indians that Custer attacked at the Washita, and from whom a retreat was deemed advisable. General W. B. Hazen criticized the policy of issuing arms to Indians in a letter he wrote to General W. T. Sherman in November, 1868. Hazen wrote concerning Indian raids from Indian Territory into Texas by Kiowa, Cheyenne and Comanche bands that were supposedly friendly. Hazen pointed out:

It is . . . worthy of notice that the government has regularly issued arms and ammunition to these people for many years while the marauding was known to be going on.⁹²

As has been noted, the policy of giving firearms to Indians was not popular with the army on the frontier. Too often the troops were confronted by hostiles whose guns were so acquired. To put an end to this, the Secretary of War

⁹⁰ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 165.

⁹¹ Report of the Secretary of War [1868], 12.

⁹² Papers of the Generals W. T. Sherman and P. H. Sheridan, 43.

made his usual request that the Department of Indian Affairs be returned to the War Department.⁹³ Little notice was taken of this request, as interested parties did not wish to see such a prize "boondogle" as the Indian Bureau removed from their control.

Army weapons had been improved during 1868, but many units were still equipped with muzzle-loading arms. Colt's percussion army revolvers were so precious on the frontier that they were kept locked under an officer's bed, except for war or drill, because soldiers received high prices by selling them to settlers and traders.⁹⁴ The sale of arms by deserters and troopers wishing whiskey money was a real problem.⁹⁵

The following year, 1869, saw only minor Indian troubles on the frontier, and a state of armed truce existed between the army and the still powerful plains tribes. Small bands of Indians were still raiding and depredating, but the majority of Indians were maintaining a precarious peace with the government.

Action against the irreconcilable "Dog Soldiers" (Sioux and Cheyenne warriors who remained hostile) indicated the increasing numbers of improved arms obtained by Indians. A small expedition on the Republican River in the Nebraska-Colorado border country discovered eighty-four lodges of "Dog Soldiers" in July, 1869. The Indians were defeated and the soldiers captured fifty-six rifles and twenty-seven revolvers from them,⁹⁶ but only after a hard fight in which the soldiers outnumbered the hostiles.

Near the Mussleshell River in Montana, about a dozen raiding Sioux were

⁹³ Report of the Secretary of War [1868], xviii.

⁹⁴ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 67.

⁹⁵ Report of the Secretary of War [1868], 50.

⁹⁶ Papers of the Generals W. T. Sherman and P. H. Sheridan, 490.

able to hold off more than twice their own number of soldiers and civilians because of their improved weapons. "They were all armed with rifles and revolvers, and an abundant supply of ammunition."⁹⁷ The Sioux held their position for two hours, and some were able to fight their way through and make good their escape.

The illegal arms trade was receiving the full attention of the army, now that the pressure of war had been relieved. General Winfield S. Hancock, commanding the Department of Dakota, visited the Mouse River region to see if a post could be located there to break up the trade between the Red River half-breeds and the northern plains tribes. Hancock reported: "That trade consists, I am informed, of powder, guns, whiskey, etc., which results to our disadvantage."⁹⁸ The report further stated that as many as fifty or sixty such traders wintered on Mouse River to carry on this trade.

The Apaches in the south were slowly beginning to procure better arms, and General Ord's report for 1869 indicated some repeating rifles, revolvers, several muzzle-loading arms, and many bows and arrows among the goods taken from hostile Apaches.⁹⁹ However, the soldiers were now all using breech-loading guns, and the Apaches were getting the worst of the fighting.¹⁰⁰

The Chief of Ordnance reported in 1869 that the Springfield system of breech-loading could be improved upon, and that other systems were favored by several army men. A board of officers was appointed to test the various arms submitted to it as of March 1, 1870, and to report its findings so that a

⁹⁷ Lieutenant James B. Goe, "The Thirteenth Regiment of Infantry," in Ridenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 582.

⁹⁸ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 41 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1869] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1869), I, 64.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 127-129.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 121.

standard breech-loader could be issued to all troops.¹⁰¹

Large numbers of improved arms were issued to the regular army in 1869, and it was reported:

The cavalry have all been supplied with Spencer carbines or with Sharp's carbines altered to take the musket metallic cartridges calibre .50. About 30,000 of these later arms have been altered. The Spencer carbine at the end of the war was generally regarded with favor, and as being the best arm in the service, and it continues to be regarded as a superior arm by the cavalry. The altered Sharp's carbine gives great satisfaction, and in some respects - particularly in the ammunition, which is the same as the breech-loading musket ammunition - it is decidedly superior to the Spencer carbine.¹⁰²

This was not the whole story though, as previous reports had recommended that no single-shot carbine be adopted for cavalry use, and several reports had specified the Spencer for issuance to frontier troops. This writer encountered no instance in which the Sharp's carbine was so mentioned. In addition to the equipping of all cavalry units with metallic cartridge breech-loaders, the arming of all infantry regiments with the altered .50 calibre Springfield rifle had also been completed with the issuing of 6,406 altered Springfields.¹⁰³ The significance of this change has already been discussed; however, the last report concerning this change is worth including here. On May 6, 1869, a train guarded by soldiers was attacked by Apaches, one soldier was killed, "but the Indians were so impressed by the operations of breech-loaders, then used on them for the first time, that they regularly stampeded."¹⁰⁴

No mention is made of the use of Gatling guns in the reports of frontier

¹⁰¹ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 41 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1869] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1869), I, 32.

¹⁰² Ibid., 442.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁴ Colonel Thomas M. Anderson, "The Fourteenth Infantry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 608.

officers for 1869, but twenty-three .50 calibre Gatlings were issued to the regular army in this year, and from then on played an ever increasing role in Indian warfare.¹⁰⁵

By 1869, the transition from muzzle-loading percussion arms to those using metallic ammunition and loading at the breech had been accomplished. The army had a slight edge of arms superiority for a short time, but the Indians were obtaining breech-loaders as fast as they could, and the repeating Winchester, Spencer, and Henry arms were procured by Indians who before had used bows, muskets, or muzzle-loading rifles. A great change had come over the tactics of Indian warfare, and the army could no longer rely on a small handful of soldiers to deal with large numbers of poorly armed Indians as in the pre-metallic cartridge era.

¹⁰⁵ Report of the Secretary of War [1869], 451.

CHAPTER III

BEHIND THE FACADE OF PEACE

By 1870, all units of the regular army had been armed with rifles and carbines using metallic ammunition and loading at the breech. The only percussion weapons still in use were the Colt and Remington revolvers. The only other muzzle-loading armaments in current use were the cannon with which most of the artillery had been equipped during the Civil War. Many cavalry units were armed with the seven-shot Spencer carbine that had proved so effective in the Indian campaigns between 1865 and 1870, but this weapon was soon to be discontinued in favor of a single-shot carbine.

A board of officers had been appointed to test various small arms, and the board's report was to be utilized in choosing a standard arm for all branches of the army. In November, 1870, the Secretary of War reported that no decision had been reached by the testing board.¹ However, General of the Army William T. Sherman's comments on the selection of a standard breech-loader did not agree with the statement of the Secretary of War. Sherman said:

This board, composed of officers of great experience, was required to report on the best small-arms and equipments for the army Their conclusion . . . has heretofore been laid before the Secretary of War, who has ordered a limited supply of the arms recommended by the board to be distributed to the army for further practical tests. But I observe that the Chief of Ordnance . . . advises that another 50,000 of the Springfield musket should be altered according to the present pattern This would imply

¹ Report of the Secretary of War [1870], I, xii.

a selection of that form of musket before the practical tests now in progress are completed. The recommendation of the board was strongly in favor of the Remington system, and I concur with it entirely, and therefore suggest to the secretary that he await the results of the tests he has already ordered before incurring the expense of alteration of the second 50,000. All officers agree that the present musket is an admirable weapon, but the breech-block is not suited to a carbine, and entirely out of the question for the pistol, whereas the Remington system is equally suited to all.²

The ordnance department of the army was able to act almost independently in this matter because it was under the direct supervision of the Secretary of War and was not subject to the control of the General of the Army. Apparently, the system devised by Erskine Allin was favored over all other breech-loaders. That it was not considered by all to be the best type available is clear, but the reasons for its continued use are obscure. Allin's alteration had originally been accepted mainly because it was cheap and easy to implement. The inventor had been promoted in rank and placed in charge of operations at Springfield armory, but was originally not supposed to be paid royalties for the use of his patent, as he had developed his system for altering the .58 calibre rifle-musket while an employee of the government. Allin later brought suit for non-payment of royalties on the use of his invention, and the claim was ruled partly valid by the courts, although, by 1870, the Allin system had been so modified in details as to be actually a different arm than the one originally tested in 1865. No proof seems to exist that Allin's influence was such as to have his interests unduly well protected by the army ordnance bureau and the courts, but considering the business and political morality of the times, it is not unlikely that, political influence and possibly graft played their part in the equipping of the United States army with the Springfield rifle.

² Report of the Secretary of War [1870], I, 5.

Sherman's preference was for the Remington rifle and carbine, and many other officers had recommended the use of the Spencer carbine and rifle. Only the most conservative were favorable to the Springfield by 1870. Several types of repeating arms had been offered to the army, but all of them were considered not rugged enough for military service, although thousands of Winchester model 1866 rifles, Henry rifles, and Spencer rifles and carbines saw much hard service on the frontier in the hands of civilian settlers and plainsmen. However, the army was saddled with the single-shot Springfield until 1892, and this lack of arms improvement cost many lives in the Indian warfare of the period.

The Chief of Ordnance reported in 1870 that only a few arms had been altered or produced as breech-loaders, 3,184 Sharp carbines being the largest lot altered.³ The report further went on to say that over a million small arms had been sold and that "Should the demand for arms and other munitions continue as at present, the Department will be able, in a short time, to dispose of the greater part of its surplus stores."⁴ Many of these arms were breech-loaders left over from the Civil War, including Spencer, Henry, Sharp and many other types of improved arms. Large numbers of these guns were sold to the French government, but many eventually found their way to the hands of frontier traders who reaped big profits by retailing them to Indians.

The trade in smuggled arms had become so serious by 1870 that General Christopher C. Augur, commanding the Department of the Platte, recommended that the government give the Indians a limited supply of arms to keep them from obtaining guns from smugglers.⁵ This was a departure from previous

³ Report of the Secretary of War [1870], I, 291.

⁴ Ibid., 292.

⁵ Ibid., 34.

opinion, and represented the army's acknowledgement that it would be better to give the Indians a few older government arms than to have them buy repeaters from traders. General John Pope, commanding the Department of the Missouri, discussed the relations between the Indians and the United States army in his report for 1870. Pope was especially concerned with the fact that the army had no jurisdiction within the limits of the Indian reservations. Thus the conduct of Indian wars was made more difficult for the army because the Indians "may accumulate everything needed for them," without interference from the army.⁶ Obviously, the articles most needed were good rifles and an adequate supply of ammunition. Pope further discussed the problem of arms in relation to the policy of the Indian Bureau. He said that the Indians were being urged to remain peaceful by being given "everything they covet."⁷ As the Indian measured his wealth in ponies and weapons, it was of course the coveted arms that were furnished by the Indian agents. Most officers felt that this form of appeasement was the worst sort of foolishness, as it only made the Indians feel that they were more powerful than the government and made trouble harder to stop once it had begun.

The frontier was experiencing a short lived period of relative freedom from Indian warfare. Treaties had been negotiated with most of the hostile tribes in 1868 and 1869, and Indian troubles were confined in 1870 to a few sporadic raids and horse stealing expeditions by isolated bands and young warriors out for pleasure. As usual, the treaties so recently signed contained the seeds of future troubles. The Sioux, for example, were guaranteed their sovereignty over the Black Hills country, which in less than a decade

⁶ Report of the Secretary of War [1870], 9.

⁷ Ibid., 18.

was to be the scene of army expeditions searching for gold. Both Indian and army leaders knew that the much publicized peace was an armed truce at best. In the short interval of relative peace, the Indians had completed their armament, and the actions of the mid-1870's, which the army frequently lost, mirrored this change.

The Ordnance Department was still testing new arms in 1871, selling large lots of surplus weapons to arms dealers, and issuing small numbers of new small arms for trial by the troops.⁸ The board studying breech-loading small arms was to make its final choice in 1872, although the Chief of Ordnance had already designated a new model of the Springfield .50 calibre breech-loader for government production.⁹ The Remington system had been tentatively adopted for use in a single-shot, breech-loading pistol of .50 calibre, and a number of these hand-guns were purchased from the Remington firm.¹⁰ These pistols were intended to replace the percussion revolvers using paper cartridges. This change was never fully implemented, as revolvers were improved to use metallic ammunition thus removing the chief objection to their continued use.

Reports from frontier army officers in 1871 contained the usual information about the illicit gun traders and the rapid acquisition of better arms by the Indians. General Pope reported his interest in stopping the gun traffic in the Department of the Missouri. Pope's report of October 2, 1871 praised his men for their efforts, stating:

Major Clendennin, Eighth Cavalry, with three companies of his regiment has been in camp on the Canadian River, below Fort Union,

⁸ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 42 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1871] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871), I, 250.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 252.

during the entire summer, and has rendered important service in breaking up the illegal traffic with Indians on the Plains, which has for years been carried on by Pueblo Indians and Mexican citizens of the Territory of New Mexico. This traffic, which has supplied the wild Indians with arms and ammunition . . . has always been injurious [to peace].¹¹

In the northern plains region, steps were being taken to stop the trade between the Red River half-breeds and the Indians on the United States side of the border. This trade was the chief source of ammunition for the Sioux hostiles of previous years, and had been a source of irritation for a long time. In October, 1871, two companies of infantry were sent to Old Fort Belknap to suppress this illegal trade in ammunition and whiskey,¹² but, as always, they were only partially successful in accomplishing their mission. Breaking up this sort of trade was very difficult, as the soldiers had to patrol tremendous areas, and the traders could usually avoid them and still make contact with their customers.

The only major Indian campaigns of 1871 were those carried on against the Apaches in the South and an expedition for the exploration and security of the Yellowstone Valley in Montana and Wyoming. Colonel, and later General George Crook led the campaign against the Apaches. Crook, in his report for 1871, complained that badly needed ordnance supplies (arms and ammunition) were not reaching him as he had requested. Crook said that, "requisitions forwarded six months since have not yet been filled, and much inconvenience is thereby occasioned."¹³ The Indians Crook was fighting were generally not as well armed as those of the northern frontier, but had acquired many more

¹¹ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 42 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1871], I, 43.

¹² Lieutenant A. B. Johnson, "The Seventh Regiment of Infantry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 505.

¹³ Report of the Secretary of War [1871], I, 77.

guns than they had possessed at the close of the Civil War. Crook certainly could not be expected to fully prosecute the campaign when his ordnance stores were not adequate.

The Yellowstone Expedition of 1871 was sent to secure detailed scientific information and to maintain peace in the region. This expedition was made by about four hundred and fifty men, including "a detail of twenty men from the Twenty-second Infantry, acting as artillerists, manning two Gatling guns."¹⁴ No Indians were encountered by the troops, but the addition of the Gatling guns to the expedition was an indication that the army on the frontier was beginning to make use of this powerful weapon.

By late 1872, Indian troubles had increased and it was evident that the short interval of peace was fast drawing to a close.¹⁵ Army men were becoming increasingly concerned over the illegal gun trade with Indians and the practice of the Indian Bureau of supplying many Indians with arms and ammunition - for subsistence hunting. The gun smugglers of the southern Staked Plains region were a particular irritation, and came in for a good deal of critical comment. General Christopher C. Augur, commanding the Department of Texas, reported to the Secretary of War that as of September 28, 1872, traders from New Mexico were still furnishing arms and ammunition to hostiles on the Staked Plains.¹⁶ Captain Henry E. Alvord, Commissioner to the Kiowas, Comanches, and other tribes in western Indian Territory, reported that agency traders had been forbidden to sell any arms and ammunition to Indians. Alvord justified this prohibition, saying:

¹⁴ Report of the Secretary of War [1871], I, 27.

¹⁵ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 42 Cong., 3 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1872] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), I, 35.

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

. . . it is found that the Indians who are most insubordinate . . . are always fully armed, not only for the hunt, but for war, with weapons of the latest pattern and well supplied with ammunition . . . [and] still greater efforts should be made to break up the contraband trade . . . which is carried on chiefly in the autumn and the winter in the Staked Plains region.¹⁷

Both General Augur and Captain Alvord felt that depriving the Indians of good arms and sources of supply would go far toward settling the Indian problem.

Selling arms to Indians and the issuing of weapons by Indian agents was also a critical problem in the northern plains area in 1872. General Winfield S. Hancock reported to the Secretary of War that as of October 3, 1872:

It is notorious, and not attempted to be concealed by the Indians themselves, that their supplies and munitions of war to enable them to carry on campaigns against these troops [in the Department of Dakota] are provided directly by the authority of the Government at the different Indian agencies and at other points (trading-posts) within reach, at which establishments employees have to be protected by troops from . . . the same Indians. Even when supplies are being distributed to these Indians.¹⁸

Hancock was especially irritated because the Secretary of the Interior had supposedly issued orders on September 9, 1872, to stop the sale of arms and ammunition to hostiles in Montana and Dakota.¹⁹ Restriction of non-reservation traders was also advocated by General Hancock. He said those traders who could not be supervised should be denied licenses and kept out of Indian country. The Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Montana had claimed that he was careful that no traders furnished guns and ammunition to the Sioux, but that he could not stop the Sioux from obtaining weapons from the Red River half-breeds from Canada, which was the source, said the Superintendent,

¹⁷ House Executive Document No. I, Part 5., 42 Cong., 3 Sess., Report of the Secretary of the Interior [1872] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), I, 550.

¹⁸ Report of the Secretary of War [1872], I, 41.

¹⁹ Report of the Secretary of War [1872], I, 44.

from which the Sioux ". . . have procured most of their firearms and ammunition."²⁰ The Red River traders may have been the chief source of guns for the Sioux, but it still seems ridiculous that the Indian Bureau should supplement this supply with government arms.

The type of arms issued by the Indian Bureau also was criticized. General Hancock said:

If arms are issued or sold to Indians, they should be not our arms of precision, only those of inferior quality [percussion muzzle-loaders] yet suitable for the hunt, and in this matter we could wisely follow the practise of our neighbors in the British possessions.²¹

Hancock's suggestion was largely ignored, as the Indian Bureau did not revert to issuing muzzle-loaders to their charges. No one in the army wanted to see the Indian Bureau furnish Spencer, Henry, Winchester, Remington, Sharp and older model (1866, 1867) Springfield rifles to Indians who were expected to go on the warpath at any time, yet nothing was done toward restricting the issuance of improved arms to Indians in 1872. Perhaps the size and influence of the arms industry of the times had a great deal to do with this matter. Few firearms manufacturers wished to have large numbers of good customers cut off from trade by legislation restricting the sale of metallic cartridge breech-loaders and repeaters to Indians as was done in Canada.

Open warfare had not yet broken out on the frontier by the end of 1872. Some military expeditions were undertaken, but they were mainly aimed at maintaining the sham peace or hampering the operations of gun runners. General John Pope, commanding the Department of the Missouri, sent an expedition to the southern border area of Indian Territory to "put a stop to illicit traffic

²⁰ Report of the Secretary of the Interior [1872], I, 42.

²¹ Report of the Secretary of War [1872], I, 42.

of New Mexican traders with the Kiowas and Comanches [the same Indians mentioned in Captain Alvord's report]; a trade embracing exchange of powder and lead on one side for cattle and horses stolen in Texas by the Indians."²² General Hancock ordered a strong force to operate as a deterring factor to warlike Indians in the Powder River country of northern Wyoming and the Dakota-Montana border region. This expedition included six hundred men, two Gatling guns, and one brass twelve-pounder cannon.²³ Only infrequent skirmishes took place, but the Sioux were stirring for trouble and the troops would have some real fighting before too long. Hancock was worried about the change in Indian warfare brought about by the Indians being better armed than in previous times.²⁴ Some officers scoffed at such apprehensions, but Hancock's concern proved well founded when thousands[?] of Winchester, Spencer and Henry-armed warriors went on the warpath a few years later.

Secretary of War Belknap's report for 1872 contained the information that revolvers altered and intended to use metallic cartridges had received favorable notice, and would probably soon be issued to all cavalry.²⁵ Belknap further stated that inventions used by the government that had been developed by government employees were not subject to royalties or profits.²⁶ This was specially intended to apply to Erskine S. Allin, inventor of the Springfield breech-loading system. The tests of various breech-loaders was still under way, though the choice of the Springfield seems to have been a

²² Report of the Secretary of War [1872], I, 47.

²³ Ibid., 40.

²⁴ Ibid., 42.

²⁵ Ibid., 10.

²⁶ Ibid.

foregone conclusion, as has been previously noted. Many improved arms had been issued to the regular army during 1872, but most of them were only for trial and were soon withdrawn from service. More .50 and 1. calibre Gatling guns were issued, 1,057 of the highly regarded Spencer carbines were issued, and four hundred of the new metallic cartridge Smith & Wesson revolvers and numbers of altered .44 calibre Colt and Remington revolvers were issued in place of the older percussion models.²⁷

The major Indian campaign of 1873 actually began the year before. The Modoc Indians of northern California and southern Oregon were thoroughly stirred up over the question of their removal to another reserve, and after late summer, 1872, all that was needed was a spark to set off an Indian war. Most of the army officers believed they would have little trouble with the hundred or so Modoc warriors, but the Indian Agents and the civilian scouts knew that war with the Modocs would be a serious matter. The first significant action took place on December 2, 1872, when a few troops attacked the camp of Captain Jack, leader of the hostiles. The soldiers captured the camp and took several horses and at least three good rifles that were the personal property of Captain Jack,²⁸ but the Modocs rallied and drove the troops away with considerable loss. General Edward Canby, commanding the Department of the Columbia, reported the action to headquarters of the Division of the Pacific on January 15, 1873. Canby stated, ". . . a grave mistake was no doubt committed in attempting their [the Modocs] removal before a sufficient force had been collected."²⁹ One of the mistakes made was

²⁷ Report of the Secretary of War [1872], I, 322-323.

²⁸ House Executive Document No. 122, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., Official Copies of Correspondence Relative to the War With the Modoc Indians in 1872-'73 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1847), 43.

²⁹ Ibid., 47.

in judging the armament of the hostiles, as most of them were well armed with the best guns, not with muzzle-loaders and bows.³⁰ In any case, the Modocs managed to elude the troops and escape to the lava-beds of southeastern Oregon - a position that proved well nigh impregnable.

Although the troops had been worsted in the first action, their leaders were still confident that the campaign would prove an easy one. The first fight had been fought by troops without sufficient supplies of ammunition and arms, and since steps had been taken to remedy this situation the officers in command of the troops in the field were eager to come to grips with the Modocs. Reporting on the supply problem, Colonel Frank Wheaton said:

I found an unexpected difficulty in the scarcity of ammunition at Fort Klamath, nearly all the Spencers having been issued to citizens . . . and the supply of Sharp's and Springfield utterly inadequate; some of the troops today [December 26, 1872] have but five and ten rounds apiece Information received assures me the section of howitzers . . . tomorrow. If the amount of ammunition on hand had been sufficient, and warranted me in so doing, I would have ordered the attack on about the 27th December, . . . we will make short work of this impudent and enterprising savage.³¹

Colonel Wheaton's January 14th report to General Canby reflected the high spirits of the troops. Wheaton described his force as being the most "enthusiastic and jolly set of regulars and volunteers" that he had ever commanded.³² The scouts and friendly Indians insisted that the Modocs would put up a desperate defence, but Wheaton didn't see how they could and he expected no great difficulty in ending the outbreak.³³

On January 15, 1873, about four hundred troops attacked the Modocs in

³⁰ Official Copies of Correspondence Relative to the War With the Modoc Indians in 1872-'73, 38.

³¹ Ibid., 48.

³² Ibid., 50.

³³ Ibid.

the lava-beds. Most of these men were armed with the single-shot Springfield .50 calibre breech-loader, but at least forty-five soldiers were issued Spencer carbines to swell the volume of fire power.³⁴ Captain Jack and his warriors took cover behind the rock formations and waited until the attackers were within point blank range, then commenced a destructive fire on the soldiers that forced them back with a loss of forty killed and wounded in the first attack. After the attack, Wheaton changed his opinion of the Modocs. He warned that a thousand men would be needed to drive the one hundred or so Modocs from their lava-bed stronghold. Other officers also altered their beliefs concerning the hostiles. Major John Greene said that the aim of the Indians was "deadly," that they were "proverbially skillful as marksmen and armed with good rifles," and that "I have never seen troops engage a better armed or more skillful foe."³⁵

After the failure of the initial attacks on the lava-beds, the troops were fairly demoralized and the fighting was reduced to long range sniping and the shelling of the Modoc positions. Rumors that hostilities could end by the surrender of the Indians finally led to a truce parley with Captain Jack and the other Modoc leaders. General Canby and two other peace commissioners were attacked by the Modoc chiefs, and only one of the whites escaped - Canby and the other were shot at close range and died on the spot.³⁶

The murder of General Canby stirred the army to bend every effort toward the early destruction of the one hundred or so Modoc hostiles. General Jef

³⁴ Official Copies of Correspondence Relative to the War With the Modoc Indians in 1872-'73, 50.

³⁵ Ibid., 54-55.

³⁶ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 148.

C. Davis was given command of the troops who had been bested and humiliated in open fighting by less than one hundred ragged Modocs.³⁷ Davis began a cautious advance into the lava-beds; never advancing his infantry until the Modoc position had been thoroughly cannonaded and the hostiles forced to fall back. In this way, the Indians were finally driven to the outer edge of the lava-bed strong-hold, and once forced from their protective cover the Modocs were overwhelmed by the soldiers and the Modoc War of 1872-'73 effectively ended. These Indians had been able to so successfully defy the army for two main reasons. The first reason was the nature of the lava-beds they utilized as a natural fortress, and the second reason was that almost all of the Modocs had weapons that were superior to those carried by the soldiers. The weapon that finally decided the outcome of the war was the cannon. Without the howitzers to force the Modocs to retreat from their rock trenches, the army might easily have lost the war.

The second phase of the transition from muzzle to breech-loading small arms came to an end in 1873. The first phase had ended four years earlier with the issuing of breech-loaders to all troops on active duty. The last aspect of the change was completed with the adoption of the "Springfield system of breech-loader . . . for the muskets and carbines of the army."³⁸ This standardization was not enthusiastically received by many frontier officers; especially was this true of those who, as has been noted, recommended that no single-shot carbine be issued to the cavalry and of the others that endorsed the Remington and the seven-shot Spencer weapon for use against hostile Indians. The board of officers testing small arms also recommended that all

³⁷ Official Copies of Correspondence Relative to the War With the Modoc Indians in 1872-'73, 107.

³⁸ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 43 Cong., 1 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1873] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1873) I, 17.

weapons, rifle, carbine and revolver be of .45 calibre. Reduction of calibre was decided on because of better accuracy with the .45 and the weight of ammunition was slightly decreased from the older .50 calibre. Both rifle and carbine could now use the same ammunition, which had been impossible with the older model rifles and carbines. Supply was often a difficult factor in Indian warfare, and this standardizing of cartridges was all to the good, but repeating carbines had been offered that could handle the new .45-70-405 calibre cartridge as well as the Springfield.³⁹ The board had also recommended that further tests be conducted on magazine arms; but the legislation pertaining to the functions of this trial board prohibited further tests after a decision had been reached.⁴⁰ The officers had felt that a magazine arm should be adopted as soon as a suitable weapon was found, and specified the Ward-Burton bolt action magazine carbine as especially worthy of further consideration.⁴¹ The famous Winchester repeating rifle had been tried but considered as too "unreliable" for military service.⁴²

The explanation for the rejection of such a time-tried weapon as the Winchester lay in the almost impossible tests the trial arms were subjected to. Nothing but the simplest and strongest weapon could pass such series of trials. These trials included being fired hundreds of times without cleaning (almost impossible with black powder ammunition due to rapid fouling and corrosion), having tampered cartridges fired through the fouled barrels as well as one loaded with an excessive charge of powder and as many as three bullets, and being submerged in salt water for several hours and then allowed

³⁹ .45-70-405: .45 is the calibre, 70 indicates the number of grains of powder in the cartridges, and 405 is the granular weight of the lead bullet.

⁴⁰ Report of the Secretary of War [1873], III, 49.

⁴¹ Ibid., 48.

⁴² Ibid., 49.

to rust for days before being fired again. The object of all these tests was to ascertain which arm would best stand the hard usage of military service, and it is doubtful whether any magazine rifle could have met the almost ridiculous standards set by the ordnance department. The tests completed in 1873 had covered the Remington rifle system (advocated by many army men), the Sharp altered to use metallic ammunition, the Allin system (Springfield), the Ward-Burton bolt action weapons, and many others; however, as previously noted, the not altogether popular Springfield was the final choice.

The Chief of Ordnance reported increased interest in the so far little used Gatling gun in his report for 1873. He said that fifty .45 caliber Gatlings had been

" . . . contracted for, and it is expected will be placed in service in the early spring [of 1874] for the use of troops on the frontier. These are of such dimensions and weights as to be easily transported on pack-animals It is thought that they will be far more effective in Indian warfare than the mountain howitzers heretofore in use."⁴³

The final change from percussion to metallic cartridge revolvers had also been decided upon in 1873, and the army had contracted for enough .45 calibre Colt model 1873 (Peacemaker, Frontier) revolvers to supply all cavalry units by the spring of 1874.⁴⁴ The .45 Colt remained the standard hand-gun for many years.

One especially interesting weapon was chosen by the small arms board for issue to infantry. This was a bayonet designed for use as an entrenching tool. The trowel bayonet blade was about eleven inches long and about six inches wide at the base coming to a point at the end. It was supposed to be either fixed to the rifle for use as a shovel or bayonet or used by hand for digging rifle pits. Ten thousand of these odd bayonets were ordered to

⁴³ Report of the Secretary of War [1873], III, 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

be manufactured at the Springfield arsenal.⁴⁵

By 1873, the Spencer carbine was being issued only to replace those worn out or broken by men whose units were equipped with them, and this fine Indian fighting carbine was soon to pass from army use altogether. Over three thousand of the Sharp carbines were altered to take the .50 calibre rifle cartridge and issued to cavalry in 1873, and several hundred trial rifles and carbines had also been tested by troops in the field. Only three Gatling guns were issued in the same year, as has been noted, but the growth of interest in them was considerable.⁴⁶

The Yellowstone Expedition of 1873 was the only major troop activity of the year in the plains region. The expedition was a large one and included cannon. Its chief aim was to prevent any large gathering of Sioux and to act as a deterring factor to the hostile inclinations of the Indians. Near the mouth of the Tongue River in Montana the advance guard of the expedition was attacked by about three hundred Indians who were "well armed with breech-loading rifles."⁴⁷ The main body finally came to the rescue and the Sioux were forced to withdraw, but the hostiles had managed to seriously threaten the Sharp carbine-armed troopers, mainly because of their improved rifles.⁴⁸ Henry, Winchester, and Spencer weapons were seen in the hands of many of the Sioux. All of the Sioux seen on this expedition were said to be well armed and equipped with good weapons.⁴⁹ No large scale warfare broke out

⁴⁵ Report of the Secretary of War [1873], III, 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16-18.

⁴⁷ Major E. A. Garlington, "The Seventh Regiment of Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 256.

⁴⁸ Robert Hunt and Frazier Hunt, I Fought With Custer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 23.

⁴⁹ Captain Oskaloosa M. Smith, "The Twenty-Second Regiment of Infantry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 684.

though, but the increased number of quality guns obtained by the Sioux was a matter of concern to many army men who realized that war might begin at any time.

General Nelson A. Miles spoke of the Indian's proficiency with improved arms in these words:

The Indian's marksmanship is very accurate within the range to which he is accustomed in killing game - say within two hundred yards; but in the use of the long-range rifle, where he must take account of the elevated sights, the distance and the effect of the wind upon the flight of the bullet, he is inexperienced and in no way a match for his more intelligent enemy [United States troops].⁵⁰

Miles had touched on the main arms factor in which the army had the advantage ✓ over the Indians. The .45 calibre rifles of the infantry had a much longer range than the .44 calibre Henry and Winchester, the Spencer, or any of the carbines and rifles most commonly procured by Indians. Infantry could thus out range their attackers and often break up an attack before it got close enough for the repeating guns of the hostiles to have their deadly close range effect, and as Miles observed, even when an Indian did possess a long range buffalo or hunting rifle he was not usually proficient with it at any distance.

A tenuous peace was maintained through most of 1874, but such events as the threatened attack on the Red Cloud agency in Dakota indicated that the fabric of peace was wearing thin and must soon be rent to shreds. The Sioux who had menaced the agency were "all armed with breech-loaders and Colt revolvers,"⁵¹ and their armament was typical of the Indians of the time. The expedition that scoured the Black Hills of Dakota in 1875 was a very strong one. It included two Gatling guns and over one thousand troops.⁵²

⁵⁰ Nelson A. Miles, Personal Recollections and Adventures, 160.

⁵¹ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk, 226.

⁵² Robert Hunt and Frazier Hunt, I Fought With Custer, 36.

This was too powerful a force for the Sioux to attack with any chance of easy victory, and perhaps the presence of the two Gatlings had something to do with influencing the Indians to leave the soldiers alone. This expedition did not meet any hostile bands, but their trespassing and the news that some gold had been found were to prove one of the sparks that ignited the northern frontier a few months later.

In April of 1875, the Southern Cheyennes broke away from their reservation on the Canadian River in Indian Territory. One company of infantry and three troops of cavalry had been summoned to the agency to keep the peace, but in the fight to keep the Indians in place the soldiers did little more than hold their own. "Being well armed and well posted, the Indians held their ground until nightfall and then stole away."⁵³ This was exactly what the Cheyennes had wished to do and thus the fight must be counted a victory for the Indians. The troops followed the Cheyennes into the Sand Hills region and finally were able to attack the Indians while in camp. Gatling guns were brought to bear on the Indian camp and positions, and were able to hurl a hail of bullets into the hostiles.⁵⁴ The troops charged under cover of the Gatlings, and the Cheyennes were completely defeated. "The Indians were nearly all armed with rifles and carbines, the Spencer carbine predominating."⁵⁵ This was one of the first instances on record in which Gatling guns were used against hostile Indians.

By mid-1875, the Indian Bureau admitted that the era of peace spoken of in reports and of which assurances were constantly given was likely to

⁵³ Lieutenant John Bigelow, Jr., "The Tenth Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 294.

⁵⁴ Nelson A. Miles, Personal Recollections and Adventures, 168.

⁵⁵ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 44 Cong., 1 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1876] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), I, 6.

explode into full scale war at any time.⁵⁶ The powerful Sioux and Cheyenne were still roaming free in the Powder River area of Wyoming and Montana, and their removal from this region was considered necessary to prevent widespread frontier war. The Indians did not take kindly to the removal plan and immediately accelerated their preparations for war.

The traders of the Northern frontier were over-run with applications for the best arms and ammunition, and so determined were the Indians on the possession of these necessities to successful warfare, that in many instances a first-class, well tanned buffalo robe was offered in barter for three metallic cartridges. At such prices, they, of course, very soon obtained a supply sufficient to carry them through several campaigns.⁵⁷

Two expeditions were sent to carry out the removal policy, but neither was able to come to grips with the Indians and defeat them. A peace council was called to talk things over with the unruly Sioux and Cheyenne; however, the parley ended with nothing gained. Hyde's description of an Indian at the peace council was typical of the armament of the warriors. No bow, lance, and tomahawk armed savage was he; ". . . in one hand he clutched a Winchester, and his other fist was full of cartridges."⁵⁸ Such warriors would prove more worthy foes for the army in the months ahead.

Colonel (later General) Nelson A. Miles' opinion of one of the main causes for Indian wars was included by the Secretary of War in his annual report for 1875. Miles stated:

Through direct and indirect means they [the Indians] are allowed to provide themselves with the most improved weapons of war [Sharp, Winchester, Spencer, Remington rifles and Colt and Smith & Wesson revolvers], and this inflames their savage natures and

⁵⁶ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 44 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1876] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), I, 6.

⁵⁷ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 493.

⁵⁸ George E. Hyde, Red Cloud's Folk 243.

gives them confidence in their strength.⁵⁹

The direct means Miles referred to was the policy of the Indian Bureau of furnishing the Indians with arms, many of which were repeating rifles. The indirect means was, of course, the frontier traders who bartered and sold guns to Indians who could pay the high prices such traders placed on fire-arms. In any case, Miles clearly was not in favor of allowing Indians to procure any arms that would equip them for fighting the army and encourage them to do so.

Several developments in weapons had occurred in the three years up to and including 1875. Colt had marketed the famous Frontier revolver in 1873, and the army had adopted it for general issue to all mounted troops. Thousands of these weapons were turned out at the Colt works for both civilian and army buyers, and it was not long before modern mass production methods had flooded the frontier with the .45 Colt revolver that was to be manufactured without significant change until the Second World War. The Winchester firm brought out a new model of their repeating rifle in the same year (1873). This was also mass produced, and like the Colt became the most popular weapon of its kind on the frontier. Thousands upon thousands of Winchesters were sold on the frontier by traders who often were not averse to selling to Indians at double the price a white man would pay, and since the Indian was a good judge of arms he was quick to obtain the new rifles and the Colt revolvers that often accompanied them. In addition to the new Winchesters, many Indians procured Spencer carbines, model 1866, 1868, and 1870 Springfield breech-loaders, and many less numerous types of improved arms the army had sold when the .45 calibre Springfield rifle and carbine were adopted as

⁵⁹ Report of the Secretary of War [1875], I, 91.

standard issue for all troops.

The Secretary of War reported in 1875 that all troops had been equipped with the new .45 calibre Springfield weapons.⁶⁰ This change not only meant that the army had gained by acquiring a standard arm, but also that the valuable Spencer carbines were withdrawn entirely from service, a step opposed by many officers serving on the frontier. As noted, it was the Spencer that had served the troopers so well in many of the actions of 1867, 1868 and 1869. The new Springfield carbines were single-shot and did not have the potential fire power of the Spencer. Thus the cavalry troopers not only faced the prospect of fighting Indians who were better armed than they had ever been, but had to do so equipped with an arm in many ways inferior to those of their opponents. The army was primarily interested in equipping their troops with a weapon that would be at all times reliable, and to this end the rugged Springfield system was favored over the Spencer, Winchester and others that would fail to function even once in a thousand times. The difference between troops using the Springfield and Indians armed with the "unreliable" Spencer, Henry, and Winchester was to be well illustrated in the battles of 1876.

The years immediately preceding 1875 saw an increased interest in the Gatling gun, and the use of the Gatling was now no longer considered as primarily for flanking artillery and fortifications but as a field weapon to accompany infantry and cavalry. Many officers, including Custer, did not appreciate the value of the Gatling gun as yet, but those who did saw that it was the army's best answer to the better arms of many hostile Indians.

The period of 1870 through 1875 was one of precarious peace maintained

⁶⁰ Report of the Secretary of War [1875], I, 19.

on the frontier by means of a makeshift armed truce between the Indians and the army. War was often threatened by minor raids and incidents of the time, but general frontier warfare had not yet broken out by the end of 1875. During this interval of sham peace the Indians had provided themselves with improved weapons at an ever increasing rate, so that by 1876 the tribes of the plains had reached their peak strength in firearms. The army had improved and changed its armament during the same period, but not always for the better; however, the weapons that were to be standard issue until 1892 had finally been decided upon. Perhaps the most radical development in the army's weapons was the growth of interest in and acceptance of the Gatling rapid fire machine gun. The activities of the army on the frontier had been largely confined to halting the illegal arms trade and to extensive expeditions and patrols to preserve a semblance of peace. Both efforts failed to attain their ultimate goals. Countless numbers of army men continued to object to the Indian Bureau's policy of issuing guns to Indians; these warnings also were mostly fruitless, and generally were only heeded after hostilities were in progress.

At the end of 1875 the Indian Bureau decided that all the Indians of the northern plains would have to be directly subjected to the authority of the government. On January 3, 1876, runners were sent to the various tribes and bands to the effect that those who did not report to a designated Indian agency by January 31 would be considered as hostile and treated accordingly. This was a very foolish order, as it was almost impossible for many Indians to break camp and move in weather that often reached 26 degrees below zero, and only tended to create sympathy for the non-agency Indians among many who were located at agencies. Large numbers of supposedly friendly Indians

left their agencies and joined the wandering bands. War was thus forced by the action of the government. The significance of the arms employed in the campaigns that followed will constitute the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE FLOOD AND EBB OF INDIAN WAR

The decision of the government that all the Indians of the northern frontier would have to turn themselves in to a designated agency by January 31, 1876, put in motion a chain of events that finally led to the crushing of Indian power in that region. Few of the army men that were to lead the troops in the ensuing campaigns anticipated that the Indian wars of 1876 would assume the proportions and seriousness that they did. Most officers had only the vaguest conception of what fighting the powerful and superbly equipped Sioux and Cheyenne actually meant in terms of preparation and numbers involved.

It was not until the late spring of 1876 that the major plan of operations against the Sioux and Cheyenne allies was put in motion. The plan was to have three columns of troops converge on the area thought to be occupied by the hostiles and crush the Indians in one blow. As it turned out, the Sioux managed to fight the troops before they were able to rendezvous and the plan was a failure.

General George Crook's column of about one thousand men was the first to engage the hostiles. On June 17, 1876, Crook's force was attacked on the Rosebud River, in Dakota, by a band of roughly twelve to fifteen hundred hostiles. "The Indians were better armed than the soldiers and possessed ammunition in plenty."¹ The battle lasted for twelve hours and finally

¹ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 184.

ended with the withdrawal of the Indians; however, "Crazy Horse [leader of the hostiles in this action] actually defeated General Crook."² Colonel Richard I. Dodge's comment on this battle was that "Nothing but the courage and discipline of the command, and the galling fire of the long-range rifles of the infantry [.45 calibre Springfield] saved it from complete destruction."³ This emphasizes again the major importance of the longer range of the army rifle than that of the repeaters of the Indians. Although the Battle of the Rosebud was not exactly decisive, Crook's column was so badly mauled that it was forced to return to its base camp for supplies and re-organization, and it was the improved arms of the Indians that had defeated Crook.

A few days after Crook's unhappy experience with the Sioux, Custer and his Seventh Cavalry were detached from General Alfred Terry's column to track down a report that the main hostile camp was on the Little Big Horn River a few days march from the main column. Custer's men were all armed with the .45 calibre single-shot Springfield carbine and .45 calibre Colt model 1873 revolvers, each man carried one hundred rounds of cartridges for his carbine and twenty-four rounds of revolver ammunition.⁴ After proceeding a short distance, Custer sent his two Gatling guns over to Colonel John Gibbon's western column as he feared they would possibly slow his march with the result that the Indians would escape.⁵ These same guns might have made a tremendous difference in the battle that occurred a few days later, when Custer was killed with one half of his regiment. Custer expected to

² James McLaughlin, My Friend the Indian (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), 121.

³ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 446.

⁴ Robert Hunt and Frazier Hunt, I Fought With Custer, 66.

⁵ Major Alfred E. Bates and Captain Edward J. McClernand, "The Second Regiment of Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 185.

fight about fifteen hundred Indians, "most of these to be poorly armed," and generally did not foresee any serious danger to himself and his command.⁶

On locating the hostile camp, Custer divided his force into two groups and decided to attack at once. Taking personal command of the first group, Custer disappeared in the direction of the Indian camp with about two hundred and forty men. What followed has never been definitely agreed upon, as no army witnesses survived to describe the fight. In any case, Custer must have seen his mistakes in judgment almost immediately. His force was at once attacked by twice the number of hostiles he had expected and the large majority of them were carrying Winchester and other improved rifles as well as revolvers.

Three thousand warriors, armed with the best magazine rifles, gathered in the ravines and coolies and burst upon Custer's intrepid band. Of course, it was but a question of time; encumbered by the led horses; provided with an inferior arm [single-shot Springfield carbine]; the Indians not only twelve to one, but each of these twelve firing at close quarters five shots to every soldier's one, the end was soon reached.⁷

Several Indian survivors have given their versions of what transpired after Custer split his command and was surrounded by the hostiles. Rain-in-the-Face, one of the Sioux leaders, was persuaded in 1894 to comment on a painting of the Custer battle. The Indian leader's statement as given to W. Kent Thomas, a newspaper reporter, and later published in Cyrus Townsend Brady's Indian Fights and Fighters is as follows:

This picture gives us bows and arrows. We were better armed than the long swords [soldiers, especially cavalry]. Their guns wouldn't shoot but once - the thing [ejector] wouldn't throw out the empty cartridge shells.⁸

⁶ Robert Hunt and Frazier Hunt, I Fought With Custer, 79.

⁷ Major E. A. Garlington, "The Seventh Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Has-kin, Army of the U. S., 259.

⁸ Cyrus Townsend Brady, Indian Fights and Fighters, 285.

Nearly all the Indian versions of the story indicate that the hostiles' superior weapons gave them a great advantage over the troops, and that the defective ejection of empty cartridges rendered many of the soldiers carbines useless.⁹

Major Marcus Reno was in command of the largest remaining detachment of the Seventh Cavalry after Custer left to attack the Sioux village. The force under Reno was also heavily attacked and the account furnished by its commanding officer gave much attention to the armament of the hostiles. Having dug themselves in on a small bluff, Reno's men prepared to resist any Indian assaults. Reno described the Indian attack that took place the morning after Custer and his men had been wiped out in these words: "I heard the crack of two rifles. This was the signal for the beginning of a fire that I have never seen equaled. Every rifle was handled by an expert [Indian] marksman, and with a range that exceeded our carbines."¹⁰ The fighting continued until Indian scouts warned of the approach of Terry's column; this news caused the Sioux and Cheyennes to break camp and retreat, as they had no particular wish to fight so soon after the Custer battle. This was virtually the end of the three-pronged campaign of the summer of 1876. It had ended in defeat and disaster for the United States troops and mirrored the significance of the change in Indian arms from the days of lance, bow and muzzle-loader to that of the magazine rifle.

Major Reno ended his report of the Little Big Horn debacle with a plea that the Indian Bureau not add to the burden of the army by furnishing arms to Indians. Reno declaimed:

⁹ James McLaughlin, My Friend the Indian, 153.

¹⁰ Report of the Secretary of War [1876], I, 33.

It is too recent for me not to ask the good people of this country whether a policy that sets opposing parties in the field, armed, clothed, equipped by one and the same government, should not be abolished.¹¹

The defeats of mid-1876 did much to influence public opinion on the subject of issuing and selling of guns and ammunition to Indians, and the subsequent policy of disarming all suspected Indians was largely the result of the army's being able to use the pressure of public opinion to achieve its long sought-for aim of having the supply of war materials restricted on the frontier.

In August, 1876, the following joint resolution was passed by Congress:

Whereas, it is ascertained that the hostile Indians of the Northwest are largely equipped with arms which require special metallic cartridges, and that such special ammunition is in large part supplied to such hostile Indians directly or indirectly through traders and others in the Indian country: Therefore,

RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED, That the President of the United States is hereby authorized and requested to take such measures as in his judgment may be necessary to prevent such special metallic ammunition being conveyed to such hostile Indians, and is further authorized to declare these same contraband of war in such district of country as he may designate during the continuance of hostilities. Approved, August 5, 1876.¹²

It will be noticed that the supply of special cartridges would be shut off only after hostilities had broken out, and that other than metallic ammunition could still legally be sold or given to Indians who very often reloaded their own cartridges anyway. This was not exactly the answer to the army's prayers on the subject of Indian arms, but it was a step in the right direction and shows an awareness of the arms situation on the frontier to which most of the government officials had heretofore either been oblivious or desirous of concealing.

¹¹ Report of the Secretary of War [1876], I, 35.

¹² Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, for the Year 1877 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), 232.

Following the failure of the summer campaigns, the army began a campaign aimed at constantly harrassing the now dispersed bands of Indians until the hostiles would grow so tired of fighting and running as to be glad to surrender to the pursuing troops. This furnishes an example of the importance of co-ordinated efforts and long range aims as pursued by the army leaders. To the Indian, such continued co-operation between tribes or bands and agreement among themselves on the carrying out of long range plans was a totally foreign idea. Even the Indian concept of war was different. The Indian was enthusiastic for war only when he felt like fighting, and did not expect to participate in any long term campaign before returning to his village and resting while supplies were prepared for another campaign. Thus, the powerful horde of Sioux and Cheyenne that had beaten Crook at the Rosebud and Custer at the Little Big Horn soon broke up into numerous smaller bands, each expecting to go its own way once the troops had been worsted. As far as most of the hostiles were concerned, the war had been a good one; the soldiers had been beaten, and the time for concentrated fighting had passed. This enabled the army to pursue each of the many bands of hostiles separately and to defeat them piecemeal where they had failed to do so as a body.

In September, 1876, the camp of Crazy Horse's band of Sioux was discovered and attacked by a strong force of soldiers. The battle raged for several hours, and it was only when cannon were used to shell the hostiles from their positions that the troops were able to force the surrender of the Indians.¹³ These Indians were nearly all armed with Winchester repeating rifles, and it was the use of the "wagon gun" more than carbines and rifles of the troops that finally caused the Sioux of Crazy Horse's band to surrender.

¹³ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 223.

Early in October, 1876, Sitting Bull, leader of the most disaffected Sioux, agreed to a parley with the military. Sitting Bull wanted "an old fashioned peace," with privileges of trade, especially in ammunition,¹⁴ but the army would listen to no other terms than unconditional surrender. A sharp skirmish followed during which Sitting Bull and his followers were able to escape and eventually find their way to sanctuary in Canada. One of the chief reasons that Sitting Bull even considered peace was that his band was almost completely out of ammunition and had to replenish their supply.

On October 23, 1876, a column of troops found Red Cloud's camp and demanded that the Indians surrender their arms. Red Cloud's band was perhaps the least hostile of all the Sioux and so more ready to comply with the army's order, at least in form.

The men [Indians] remained in camp but their arms were promptly taken away, making resistance futile. No doubt they had cached their best guns, for they had been ordered to turn them in some time before, the arms taken were practically useless.¹⁵

In this disarming maneuver, the usual results were obtained. That is, the Indians peacefully surrendered their oldest and worst arms and hid the Winchesters, Spencers, revolvers, and other good weapons until the time came when their use was again called for. The same results were observed when the Cheyennes at the Standing Rock Agency were disarmed. "A large number of broken, obsolete and worthless guns, a few serviceable arms, and about two thousand ponies were secured."¹⁶ No mention was made of Winchester and other improved arms, and the Cheyennes had doubtlessly also hidden their best weapons before the troops could seize them. The task of disarming the Indians would have to

¹⁴ Report of the Secretary of War [1876], I, 33.

¹⁵ Homer W. Wheeler, Buffalo Days (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923), 116-117.

¹⁶ Major E. A. Garlington, "The Seventh Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Has-kin, Army of the U. S., 260.

be a continuous and long term project, entailing many searches and confiscations, to make the disarming policy a success.

Other Cheyenne bands were not so peaceably disposed, the group led by Dull Knife being particularly obdurate. In November, 1876, General Randal S. Mackenzie managed to overtake the hostiles in camp on the Powder River. The well equipped Cheyennes took up their position in the hills surrounding the camp and proceeded to pour a deadly fire into the troops that had captured the village, and "it soon became apparent that the attacking force, ten hundred and fifty strong, was powerless against less than half its numbers of their gallant and well posted enemies."¹⁷

General Mackenzie very wisely did not attempt to force them out of their improvised rifle pits or from behind the rocks on the hillside. Had he done so our loss of life would have been fearful He sent back to General Crook for the infantry, with a view to having them bring their more powerful rifles to bear on the hostiles in case they did not withdraw to another position. At the time the carbine used by the cavalry was not so powerful as the rifles of the infantry, I [Homer W. Wheeler, officer accompanying Mackenzie], for one, was glad the hostiles decided to withdraw.¹⁸

Although the Cheyennes were able to halt the troops and make good their escape, the attack on their winter camp had cost them all their winter provisions, many of their horses, and all their lodges. The warriors wanted to fight again, and did not consider themselves defeated by the army; however, they had no supplies or shelter for the winter and their ammunition had been expended.¹⁹ Soon after this battle, the Cheyennes began to turn themselves in to the agencies in small groups. The troops had not been able to crush

¹⁷ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 497.

¹⁸ Homer W. Wheeler, Buffalo Days, 134-135.

¹⁹ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 499.

their power in open battle but had achieved the defeat of the Cheyenne by striking at their base camps sheltering their noncombatants and supplies. The improved weapons obtained by the hostiles made them more than a match for equal numbers of soldiers, and the policy of constant harassment of small bands of hostiles was the only way the military could be sure of breaking the power of the Indians.

By the end of 1876, the concentrations of hostile warriors that had faced the army in the preceding months had broken up into numerous small bands. The army was actively pursuing a policy of relentlessly tracking down these smaller groups and forcing them to surrender and submit to the new policy of disarmament. Because of the acquisition of so many repeating and other breech-loading arms, it had finally become glaringly apparent that peace could never be established on anything like a permanent basis as long as the Indians most likely to make trouble were allowed to retain arms that were often superior to those in use by the United States forces.²⁰ In implementing the policy of crushing and disarming the Indians who had caused the troops so much difficulty in the spring, summer and early fall of 1876, the Secretary of War reported that "our small force of effective troops has been very actively employed during the past year; quite as actively in General Sherman's opinion as at any time during the civil war [sic]." ²¹ This revelation by the head of the War Department serves to illustrate the magnitude and seriousness of the Indian campaigns of 1876, caused in large measure by the change in Indian warfare wrought by the introduction of breech-loading and repeating weapons and metallic ammunition.

²⁰ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 46 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1877] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), I, 6.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

The disarming policy continued into 1877 as the hostile bands gradually drifted back to their agencies to draw supplies necessary for their subsistence. From February through May, bands of Sioux returned piecemeal to the reservations and agencies, and by the end of May, the majority of the hostiles had been successfully located and disarmed (except for those weapons hidden by the Indians).²² The same policy of depriving the Indians of weapons was followed in dealing with other than the Sioux tribes, and in this way many of the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and other troublesome Indians were at least partially rendered powerless.²³

Though the disarming policy was a step in the right direction, large numbers of Indians were not affected by it and many still remained hostile and refused to come into the agencies. Sitting Bull, most stubborn of the Sioux hostiles, was still active and attempted to reunite the northern tribes to fight the whites. Much of Sitting Bull's activity in Montana was concerned with procuring and distributing ammunition. "He seems to have made frequent trips between the camps [of the disaffected Indians] for consultation and to distribute ammunition, which he obtained by trade with the Red River half-breeds near the British boundary."²⁴ In addition, those Sioux who had returned to their agencies were not all peaceably disposed, and many "wished to be connected with the agencies only to the extent of trading in ammunition."²⁵ Many of these Indians still possessed Winchesters and other arms that had been secreted before the troops could sieze them, and it was soon recognized

²² Report of the Secretary of War [1877], I, 55.

²³ Ibid., 59.

²⁴ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1877, 15.

²⁵ Ibid.

that the disarming policy would have to be a continuous and long term effort if it was to succeed.²⁶

That many Indian agents did not greet the new policies of forbidding the sale of arms and ammunition to Indians and of confiscating Indian weapons enthusiastically is plain to see by reading several of their reports for 1877. Some agreed that it was a good idea in principle but that enforcement would be impossible and others openly opposed the idea. The agent for the Uintah Valley, Utah, Indian Agency asked that the regulations be relaxed and explained why in his report for 1877:

After the adoption of the new regulations by the Department, in accordance with the act of Congress of August 15, 1876, my trader, whose license had expired, declined to renew it, stating that the trade would not warrant so much trouble and expense, especially as the sale of guns and ammunition was prohibited, which was a material part thereof but as he refused to comply with the regulations relative to the sale of arms and ammunition, I ordered him to remove his goods, which was accordingly done. He transferred his store to Ashley's Ford, about thirty miles distant, but outside the reservation I would therefore, earnestly request on their behalf (the Indians), that if possible, some relaxation of the rules and regulations be made so far as this agency is concerned, that our Indians may have the benefit of a trading post.²⁷

This agent was one of those who favored the idea of prohibiting the sale of arms and ammunition to the Indians but he felt that it would be better to allow the Indians to purchase some restricted supplies on the reservation than to have them go off the reserve and procure any amount and type of arms and ammunition from unsupervised traders. Agent E. H. Danforth, in charge of the White River, Colorado Agency, was one of those who did not agree with the government rules concerning firearms traffic on the reservation. Danforth pointed out:

²⁶ Homer W. Wheeler, Buffalo Days, 194.

²⁷ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1877, 185.

Although the sale of arms and ammunition upon the reserve has been prohibited . . . the Indians have had only to go off their reserve to obtain all the arms and ammunition, both "loose" and "fixed" [the latter being for use with breech-loaders and repeaters], which they desire, a number of trading-posts [sic.] being accessible, and no white man refusing to furnish these articles to Indians.²⁸

The Ute Indians under Danforth's supervision were also reported as being very restless because of white encroachment on their lands, and the agent's report indicates his concern over the procurement of supplies that would make trouble much harder to stop, which is exactly how the situation turned out when the Utes took the warpath in the period between 1879 and 1880.

Most of the agents and superintendents in charge of Indians who were either openly hostile or potentially so were in hearty accord with the disarming plan, and a number of them agreed that the plan would not only make Indian wars less serious but reduce their frequency as well.²⁹ The battles and campaigns of 1876 and 1877 had stirred the reform spirit of many who had previously been apathetic to the warnings and appeals of men who had seen the transformation of the Indian warrior from a barbarically and poorly armed fighter to the Winchester-armed opponent of the mid-1870's. However, like most reform movements, enthusiasm soon waned and the situation continued to be dangerous until the overwhelming preponderance of white settlers over their Indian neighbors made resistance futile and the defeat of the Indians a certainty.

The major Indian campaign of 1877 was that undertaken against the Nez Perce led by Chief Joseph. These Indians had been friends of the whites for many years, and many were converted to Christianity at their own request.

²⁸ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1877, 46.

²⁹ Ibid., 50.

Removal of the Nez Perce to a reservation they did not want and the loss of their ancestral home country sparked a war that is without equal as a tribute to Indian skill, perseverance and courage. Never numerous, the Nez Perce had gotten along exceedingly well with the whites and had assimilated many of their ways, including the adoption of Winchester, Sharp, Spencer and other fine arms to replace the bow and smooth-bore musket. The Nez Perce were "desperate fighters and well armed," and often proved more than a match for the troops pursuing them.³⁰

Fighting between the Indians and the troops began in June, 1877, in that portion of eastern Idaho that had for many years been the home of the Nez Perce. The aim of the Indians was to keep from being placed on an unwanted reservation, not to fight the United States army to a stand-still. Unable to retain their own lands, the Nez Perce decided to go north into Canada, as Sitting Bull had done, and make further arrangements from the security of the British territory. Thus the campaign evolved into a retreat that the troops were trying to halt before the goal of the Indians could be achieved. On June 17, 1877, a force of about one hundred and ten soldiers and citizen volunteers attacked the Nez Perce camp in White Bird Canon, Idaho. The Indians completely defeated them and forced the troops to retreat to the nearest town, leaving thirty-four of their number dead on the battle field.³¹ This was the first inkling the army had of the temper and armament of the enemy that never mustered more than about two hundred warriors and was at all times encumbered by women and children and all the possessions of the tribe.

Gatling guns were used more extensively against the Nez Perce than they

³⁰ Homer W. Wheeler, Buffalo Days, 204.

³¹ Report of the Secretary of War [1877], I, 9.

had ever been against the Sioux and other tribes. The attack on Looking Glass camp was made the partial success that it was because of the fire power available to the troops in the form of a Gatling.³² This attack had been made in an effort to keep the various bands of Nez Percez from joining together but was only successful in delaying the Indian rendezvous and in crystalizing sentiment in favor of the hostiles on the part of other Indians. The larger band of retreating Indians crossed over into Montana and continued their northward flight along the Lolo Trail. General O. O. Howard caught up with the Nez Percez on Clearwater Creek and ordered his men to attack the Indian camp at once. Sharp firing kept up for some time, and when the troops charged the Indian positions they were forced back with heavy casualties. The Indians then charged the troops and forced them to give some ground. The hostiles would have been able to continue their advance had they not been forced back to their own trenches by the Gatling guns and cannon accompanying the troops.³³ The fighting settled down to sniping as the sun went down; meanwhile, the Indians were preparing to retreat again and were all ready to leave as soon as the opportunity offered. When the troops saw what the Indians intended, they attacked them, but neither the Gatling guns nor the rifles of the soldiers could halt the fleeing Indians, and the Nez Percez had once more escaped the troops.

At the Battle of the Big Hole, August 8, 1876, Gibbon's troops learned the lesson the Nez Percez repeaters and breech-loaders had so recently taught General Howard's men. Gibbon reported that his troops were outnumbered and that the Indians were "equally as well armed and equipped."³⁴ In the course

³² Report of the Secretary of War [1877], I, 121.

³³ Ibid., 123.

³⁴ Ibid., 57.

of the fighting, the Indians captured the extra two thousand rounds of ammunition the force had brought and even succeeded in storming and capturing the cannon the troops had counted on to rout the hostiles.³⁵ Army casualties resulting from the Big Hole fight accounted for forty per cent of the troops in the command.³⁶ This was due in large part to the fine marksmanship and superior weapons of the Nez Perce, who had again defeated the United States troops and continued their retreat.

Three columns of troops maneuvered to intercept the Nez Perce before they could cross the border into Canada. The forces pursuing the hostiles had almost no chance of keeping up the chase across Montana, and the responsibility for halting Joseph and his people was placed in the hands of Colonel Nelson A. Miles, whose command was operating west and parallel to Joseph. Reports of the whereabouts and strength of the hostiles were confused and largely a matter of conjecture until an escaped prisoner of the Nez Perce came into General O. O. Howard's camp on September 1, 1877. This man told Howard that the Indians were traveling straight north, that they had "an abundance of clothing and provisions, and a superabundance of fine guns and revolvers."³⁷ Miles surmized the probable location and destination of the Indians and planned to head them off before they reached the international boundary. In October, 1877, the hostiles were located encamped in the Bear Paw Mountains about thirty miles south of the Canadian border. Joseph had halted there to give his people and horses a much needed rest, as he believed that he was safe in Canada. By a series of forced marches, Miles' force was

³⁵ Homer W. Wheeler, Buffalo Days, 357.

³⁶ Report of the Secretary of War [1877], I, 57.

³⁷ Ibid., 620.

able to intercept Joseph at his camp in the Bear Paws. The fighting that followed was almost entirely different than any Indian warfare the army had previously been familiar with. The Nez Percez constructed a series of trenches and rifle pits from which they poured a deadly fire on the attacking troops. None of the charges and attacks ordered by Miles was successful. Cannon were brought up and used to shell the Indian camp, causing considerable loss to the hostiles.³⁸ After several days of indecisive but bloody fighting Joseph agreed to surrender. Many of the Nez Percez were in favor of continuing the fight, but Joseph and many others wished to stop the bloodshed and allow their women and children to be fed and clothed again. Joseph was a great war chief but too much the humanitarian for his own good. Had he elected to leave his sick and wounded, there is no doubt that he could have escaped and found refuge in Canada; however, he would not do this and consequently surrendered rather than let the killing go on.

The Nez Percez had surrendered because they were out of provisions, not because they were beaten. Their splendid marksmanship and fine weapons made them the most formidable body of hostiles the army had ever encountered. The troops who fought in the battle in the Bear Paws lost thirty-five per cent of their men from Indian fire, and some units such as the Seventh Cavalry suffered nearly fifty per cent casualties.³⁹ One of the main reasons for the extremely heavy army losses was the fact that all the Nez Percez were armed with improved breech-loaders and repeaters. No body of Indians could have put up such a fight armed with the Indian weapons of little more than a decade earlier.

³⁸ Major E. A. Garlington, "The Seventh Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 262.

³⁹ Ibid.

Another Indian war caused by the government's determination to place all Indians on reservations assigned them began in the last days of 1877. During the preceding summer, a Winchester-armed Bannock Indian had shot and wounded some white teamsters, and the settlers of eastern Idaho were clamoring for protection from the Bannocks.⁴⁰ The tension gradually mounted, and by the end of 1877, the army was preparing to move against the Bannocks. The Bannocks in the meantime had been making their own preparations. In November, 1877, the Indian agent in the area telegraphed that he was "satisfied they [the Bannocks] are purchasing ammunition at settlements north of us, and otherwise preparing for war."⁴¹ In early January, 1878, the Bannock camp was surrounded by troops with the intention of disarming the Indians. Only thirty-two guns were seized; their best guns, ponies and pistols were not found.⁴² "The arms, though worthless were retained. Their best arms [Winchesters, Colts, Remingtons, Sharps, and others] had been secreted . . . before the military surrounded their camp."⁴³ It was well known that the Bannocks possessed many high quality weapons, and those confiscated were recognized as only obsolete and not representing anything like the armament of the Indians.⁴⁴

The procurement of war materials by the Indians was a matter of grave concern to many officials and officers who faced the task of humbling the

⁴⁰ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, for the Year 1878 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878), xii - xiii.

⁴¹ Ibid., xvi.

⁴² Ibid., xv.

⁴³ Ibid., xiii.

⁴⁴ Ibid., xix.

Bannocks, and even after hostilities had been in progress for some time, the sale of ammunition to the Bannocks by white men was known to be going on.⁴⁵

The United States marshal at Boise City, Idaho, revealed:

It is notorious here that the present hostile Indians could not keep the field but for the constant supply of arms and ammunition received from white men I trust that [the Interior department] will devise some means that will be effective to destroy this infamous practise.⁴⁶

The Interior Department agreed that such trade should be stopped, but was not able to crush it. General Oliver O. Howard estimated the Bannock strength as being about 200 warriors, well armed and supplied with ammunition.

These hostiles operated much as the Nez Perce had done in that they kept constantly on the move and hoped to escape to Canada. The Winchester equipped Bannocks succeeded in eluding or defeating the troops at every turn. At the Battle of Birch Creek, all but one company of an entire regiment of cavalry fought four hours to dislodge and defeat less than three hundred Bannocks and only partially succeeded in achieving the former and failed to do the latter entirely.⁴⁷ The hostiles fought the troops as long as they wished and then retreated as had been planned.

The troops steadily pursued the hostiles, and when the Bannocks attempted to cross the Columbia River, a gun-boat armed with small cannon and Gatling guns cut the Indians down in such numbers as to break the organized band into small groups of dispirited wanderers.⁴⁸ The humbled Bannocks soon reappeared

⁴⁵ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1878, xxi.

⁴⁶ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 45 Cong., 3 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1878] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878), I, 127.

⁴⁷ Captain R. P. Page Wainwright, "The First Regiment of Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 170.

⁴⁸ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 260 - 261.

at their reservation, and deciding to leave well enough alone, the government declined to punish the Indians any further. Thus ended the Bannock War of 1877-78.

Indian hostilities subsided somewhat in 1878, but occasionally entailed what the army termed "serious loss of life."⁴⁹ General William T. Sherman, General of the Army, argued that because of the changes in frontier conditions the army would have to be increased.⁵⁰ The possession of repeating and other breech-loading weapons had contributed in large measure to the change, and small detachments of troops were now recognized as insufficient to cope with the menace of thousands of Indians armed with Winchester, Spencer, Sharp, and Colt firearms.

The Springfield rifle and carbine were not considered as suitable by many officers on the frontier, and pursuant to legislation enacted in November, 1877, a board of officers was convened in 1878 to test what magazine arms were presented with a view to introducing a "magazine-gun for the military service."⁵¹ This board recommended the Hotchkiss bolt action magazine rifle and carbine, and \$20,000 was designated for the production and trial of the new arms.⁵² The Hotchkiss arm had a magazine capacity of five .45 calibre cartridges (as used in the Springfield rifle and carbine), and was loaded through a trap in the butt plate, the magazine being a tube in the butt stock of the piece. This was the first serious attempt at introducing a magazine weapon for issuance to the entire army, but, as will be discussed later, was unsuccessful at the time.

⁴⁹ Report of the Secretary of War [1878], I, 43.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁵¹ Ibid., 40.

⁵² Ibid.

The problems of restricting the supply of arms and ammunition to Indians and of confiscating those arms already in the hands of the Indians came in for a good deal of comment in both Indian Bureau and army reports for 1878. General John Pope was of the opinion that "The only safety is to completely disarm and dismount the Indians No arms or ammunition should be allowed them under any circumstances."⁵³ Several Indian agents claimed that no stable peace or freedom from possible Indian uprisings and depredations could be achieved until the Indians were entirely disarmed and placed in a position where they would have to either accept the white man's civilization or die.⁵⁴

Toward implementing the policy of rendering the Indian harmless by depriving him of war materials, the Secretary of the Interior ordered that his department no longer permit the sale of ammunition by its agents.⁵⁵ Some agents agreed that the plan of making the Indian powerless was a good idea but that restrictions on the sale and issuance of arms and ammunition at the agencies was not the solution to the problem, because the shady traders and gun runners of the frontier made the procurement of weapons and cartridges easier for the hostile than for the reservation Indian.⁵⁶ As an example, it was the sale of ammunition by non-reservation traders to the Utes at the White River, Colorado, Agency that enabled the Utes to fight the army to a draw in the following year (1879).⁵⁷ Efforts were made, as they had been before, to

⁵³ Report of the Secretary of War [1878], 43.

⁵⁴ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1878, 25, 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., ixiii.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 19.

halt the flow of contraband guns and ammunition to Indians who were either openly or potentially hostile; however, as long as this trade brought rich profits to the traders, it would continue to be a source of irritation and danger on the frontier.⁵⁸

In September, 1878, the Northern Cheyennes broke away from their assigned lands in Indian Territory and commenced an epic march intended to reunite them with their Sioux friends and allies of 1876. The Cheyennes had supposedly been disarmed when they surrendered at the Standing Rock Agency, Dakota, late in 1876, but had actually bargained for the retention of their arms as conditional to their surrender.⁵⁹ Only a few obsolete and worthless weapons were confiscated by the troops, as has been previously indicated. The Indian Bureau contended that it was the possession of arms as much as discontent that caused the Cheyennes to leave their reserve.⁶⁰ The Indians trekked north into Kansas and caused much alarm among the settlements. A few settlers were killed and some soldiers were lost in the fight that broke the power of the majority of the runaways. Large numbers of troops were employed against the Cheyenne, who were almost always at a heavy numerical disadvantage in action with the army. The armament of the Cheyenne can be best illustrated by running over the following list of weapons taken from thirty-three hostiles at the end of the campaign in early 1879:

4 Springfield carbines, calibre .50; 3 Springfield rifles, calibre .50; 4 Sharp's carbines, calibre .50; 1 Sharp's rifle, calibre .50; 4 Sharp's rifles, calibre .45; 1 muzzle-loading rifle; 3 Winchester-Henry repeating carbines, calibre .45; 3 Colt's revolvers, calibre .45; 2 Smith & Wesson revolvers, calibre .45; 5 Colt's revolvers

⁵⁸ Report of the Secretary of War [1878], I, 80.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁰ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1878, xxiv.

[percussion] calibre .44 and .31; and 1 Remington revolver.⁶¹

The foregoing list shows that the Cheyenne were certainly well equipped for war, and indicates a great change that had taken place since the end of the Civil War. The army employed one of the new Hotchkiss revolving cannons in this Cheyenne uprising, a weapon destined to see much extended use in settling later Indian troubles.⁶² This gun was very similar to the Gatling gun, but so constructed as to handle much heavier ammunition; like the Gatling, it was capable of very intensive and rapid fire.

The Hotchkiss magazine rifles previously mentioned were placed in the hands of the troops for trial in the field in 1879.⁶³ The single-shot Springfield .45 calibre breech-loader was still being produced, and many felt that it was the best of all possible weapons for army use and as a result, pressure against change was added to the official inertia always present when changes are proposed. No definite decision had yet been reached regarding the Hotchkiss rifle, but there was very little hope that it would supersede the Springfield.

Indian campaigns in 1879 were mainly directed against two separate groups of hostiles. The well armed Sioux who had gone across the Canadian border rather than submit after the surrender of the majority of their allies in 1876 and 1877 returned to United States soil and occasioned a strong army effort directed at their defeat and subjugation. The Sioux were operating in the Milk River area of northern Montana and being well supplied with guns and ammunition from half-breed traders.⁶⁴ The armament of the Sioux enabled

⁶¹ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 46 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1879] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1879), I, 58.

⁶² Ibid., 73.

⁶³ Ibid., xx.

⁶⁴ Military Service Institute, "The Fifth Regiment of Infantry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 478.

them to make a serious resistance to the large force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery sent against them, and without reinforcements, the troops might conceivably have suffered a crushing defeat.⁶⁵ This was the last major action in the chain of warfare that began with the Sioux outbreak in 1876.

The Ute War developed in September, 1879, when the agent unwisely demanded that the Utes send their children to his school. Tension mounted, Agent Meeker sent for troops, and the Indians began to kill whites when they learned of the approach of the soldiers. The Utes were among the best fighters of the frontier, and were never really beaten by the troops. They were all armed with modern rifles and revolvers and had an abundant supply of ammunition purchased from white men, as previously noted.⁶⁶ Never mustering more than about three hundred warriors, the Utes finally compelled the army to put a force of more than a thousand men in the field.⁶⁷ Time after time, the Utes either fought the troops to a stand-still or eluded them. The war soon became tiresome to both the Indians and the army and a truce was arranged, which virtually ended the Ute War of 1879. For the army records, the Ute War was a draw at best, and the weapons used by the hostiles were a significant factor in determining the outcome of the fighting.⁶⁸

By the end of 1879, the series of wars and campaigns that began with the Sioux rising of 1876 had at last come to an end. Increased importance was being placed on the problems accompanying the recognized need for disarming

⁶⁵ Major Alfred E. Bates, and Captain Edward J. McClernand, "The Second Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 190.

⁶⁶ Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army, 267.

⁶⁷ Report of the Secretary of War [1879], I, 11.

⁶⁸ Lieutenant Ebenezer Swift, "The Fifth Regiment of Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 230.

the Indians and restricting the supply of improved arms available to hostile or potentially hostile Indians. The Indian Bureau was no longer strongly in favor of issuing weapons to Indians, and the army had learned what the change in Indian armament meant in terms of having had to fight large numbers of Indians whose weapons often were better than those of the troops. Many recognized that though the disarming policy and restriction of supplies available to Indians were good ideas, it was really too late to do anything more than keep the Indians from acquiring any more arms, and that it would take a long time to effectually disarm those large numbers of Indians who possessed high quality arms.

The period after 1879 saw little in the way of serious Indian troubles, but the army was constantly on the alert to prevent any large outbreak. Those Indian troubles that did necessitate army action saw the ever increased use of the Gatling and other rapid fire machine guns whose presence was often enough to forestall an outbreak or end it quickly. The rising tide of settlement on the plains soon made the defeat of any group of hostiles a certainty.

CHAPTER V
THE END OF AN ERA--MACHINE GUNS
IN DAKOTA

While the end of the Indian wars and campaigns that had begun in the mid-1870's brought to a close the long series of really serious Indian wars, the period from 1880 to 1891 was one in which Indian hostilities still frequently occurred. By 1880, the power of the northern and central plains tribes had been broken, the Indians placed on reservations, and military posts established close to those Indians from whom trouble might be expected. No major activity took place on the Indian frontier in 1880, but this was due more to the power and presence of troops than to any peaceful inclinations of the recently hostile Indians.

The Hotchkiss magazine rifle which was tested for general issue to troops was officially reported as not being acceptable "due to hasty manufacture and imperfect design in some of its minor parts, which can hardly be charged to the invention."¹ The Chief of Ordnance went on to say that a new model of the Hotchkiss weapon was being prepared and that the deficiencies of the first would undoubtedly be corrected in the improved model soon to be presented.² He also commented that "there seems to be some prejudice existing in our service against the bolt system . . . that time and custom may overcome."³ For

¹ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 46 Cong., 3 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1880] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), III, xv.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

this reason, it is entirely possible that the Hotchkiss rifle did not receive anything like a fair trial. It appears that prejudice and official inertia were major factors in the tardiness of the United States to arm its troops with a modern magazine weapon. Those branches of the army that had been involved in much of the Indian fighting of the post-Civil War period, especially the cavalry, repeatedly asked for a magazine arm; however, the opinions of conservative general officers and desk personnel prevailed and the Springfield single-shot carbine remained standard issue.⁴

During the course of the Indian wars, the army became increasingly interested in the machine guns developed and presented to it for trial. In 1880, the Gardner machine gun was tested by the Ordnance Department and recommended for purchase and issuance to troops for trial in the field.⁵ Like the Gatling gun, the Gardner was fired by the turning of a hand crank by the operator, but it had only two barrels instead of the five or ten found in the Gatling and was generally of much simpler construction. The Gardner machine gun was considerably lighter than the Gatling but was also mounted on a light field artillery carriage. Its rate of fire was not as great, but neither was it subject to the frequent jams and failures common with the Gatling. In any case, the interest in the Gardner gun indicates the growing importance army men placed on machine guns.

Indian troubles were relatively few in 1881, and those that did occur were not of a serious nature. Some Apaches at the San Carlos reservation in Arizona broke away and commenced a small but bitter war. When troops were sent against the runaways, the Apache scouts, who were armed and equipped by

⁴ Report of the Secretary of War [1880], III, xv.

⁵ Ibid., 387.

the army, turned on their officers and attempted to wipe them out along with the few white soldiers in the command.⁶ The fighting was sharp, a factor due to the possession of army weapons by the mutinous scouts. This Apache trouble did not last long though, and by the end of 1881 the large majority of the hostiles had either fled to Mexico or surrendered. The same year also saw the symbolic surrender of the once formidable Sioux, three years after they had actually ceased to be a serious threat on the frontier. Sitting Bull finally sent word to United States government officials that he was willing to come in and surrender, and with the capitulation of this influential medicine man the last symbol of Sioux resistance was made a prisoner of the army.⁷

The board of officers testing magazine small arms was still in session in 1881, as no definite decision had yet been reached.⁸ Another set of tests were being conducted regarding the various machine guns then in use by the army or proposed for use. Captain E. B. Williston, the officer in charge of machine gun testing, praised the trial weapons in his report of January 1, 1881, saying:

The Hotchkiss revolving cannon has worked to my perfect satisfaction. It is the most accurate and deadly arm of which I have any personal knowledge. The Gatlings have worked well and given satisfaction. The Gardner gun . . . has proved accurate.⁹

The increased value the army placed on these weapons often proved the sound judgment of the military in accepting the machine gun. Several of the Indian fights of the later period bore this out in actions where machine guns were decisive factors. Ordnance stores issued to the regular army in 1881 illus-

⁶ Lieutenant Charles Abbot, Jr., "The Twelfth Regiment of Infantry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 570.

⁷ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 47 Cong., 1 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1881] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882), I, 4.

⁸ Report of the Secretary of War [1881], III, 5.

⁹ Ibid., 300.

trate the importance of machine guns. The list was headed by four Lowell battery (machine guns on carriages) guns, three Gardner guns and nine Gatling guns.¹⁰ All of these were chambered for the .45 calibre government cartridge.

A good deal of attention seems to have been directed toward the problem of Indian arms and their procurement in 1882. "Most Americans had no desire to serve as targets for rifles obtained from greedy traders. Yet efforts to regulate such traffic were unsuccessful."¹¹ Colonel Richard I. Dodge in commenting on the role of the Indian trader of 1882 charged the latter with furnishing

. . . most of the fine breech-loading firearms and metallic cartridges, which enable the Indians so stoutly to resist the aggression of the whites; he supplies the Indian with all those contraband articles of which the Government, with its usual wisdom, prohibits the sale of by any person in whose hands the trade might be regulated and controlled. He is not infrequently the henchman and partner of the Indian agent.¹²

Dodge's comment was intended not only to indict the illegal traders but to show the folly of complete prohibition of trade in arms and ammunition by authorized individuals. This prohibition forced the Indians to obtain their guns and cartridges from sources not hesitant on selling any quantity of quality of arms and ammunition to their customers. Dodge believed that it would be far better to sell legally older single-shot rifles to Indians than to have them procure the best repeaters and revolvers from gun runners. Legalizing the sale or issuance of firearms and ammunition to Indians might have been a partial answer to the problem; however, a tremendous responsibility would fall on those authorized to supply the controversial articles

¹⁰ Report of the Secretary of War [1881], III, 300.

¹¹ Loring Benson Priest, Uncle Sam's Stepchildren (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1942), 156.

¹² Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 600.

with respect to which Indians should be allowed to obtain guns, what quality and type of arms should be allowed and in what quantity arms and ammunition should be made available to Indians.

Another avenue through which Indians illegally acquired firearms was that provided by the degenerate white "squaw men" who often made their livelihood "by clandestinely dealing in arms and liquors."¹³ Dodge claimed they were "the pliant tools of corrupt [Indian] agents."¹⁴ There really doesn't seem to have been any adequate answer to the problem of restricting war materials to Indians. The policy of not issuing arms and ammunition to agency Indians was relaxed a little, but never enough to keep the contraband dealers from doing a thriving trade. As before, the authorities tried to halt the illegal sale of weapons, but the whole problem was never solved and remained a source of irritation until the Indian had been entirely pacified.

As in the previous year, the Apaches provided most of the hostilities for 1882.¹⁵ Troops fighting the Apaches usually did more marching than fighting, and the numbers of men involved were never very large. Trouble with these Indians lasted long after the majority of their neighbors had been cowed into submission. The still truculent Sioux remained a source of apprehension, and the supply of weapons and ammunition to these Indians occupied a prominent place in the thinking of many army and Indian Bureau officials. In June, 1882, permission was granted the Sioux at the Standing Rock Agency to go out on a buffalo hunt. James McLaughlin, the Indian Agent, was well aware of the danger of the situation, as all the Sioux at the agency were to

¹³ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 602.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 47 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1882] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882), I, iv.

leave their agency armed and equipped for the hunt. The Indian Bureau and the army both feared that trouble might develop and involve the northern frontier in war again. McLaughlin outlined his position and explained the situation in these words:

Arms were brought out and cleaned; ammunition was provided, and this was a most important matter. I had been engaged in quietly disarming the people, and it was impossible for any of them to obtain cartridges except on my order. These orders were made in favor of individuals and for a limited number of cartridges, but it was desirable that they should not receive the impression that I was fearful of their obtaining too great a supply.¹⁶

McLaughlin overstated the situation when he said that the Indians could not obtain ammunition from any other source than from him, and the claim that he had been disarming the Sioux seems a little foolish in the light of further descriptions by him of the hunters. The agent pictured the Sioux as they were about to begin the hunt. "Most of them carried repeating rifles and all had breech-loaders, except a few of the older men and boys, whose poverty forced them to use . . . the bow and arrow."¹⁷ This hardly seems to harmonize with the previous statement to the effect that the Sioux were being disarmed. No trouble did develop, but the incident served to illustrate that the Sioux could still put a formidable force in the field.

The significance of the change in Indian armament that had taken place in the twenty year period from 1862 to 1882 was not lost to many of the army men serving on the frontier. In 1882, Dodge declared that

Since the common use of breech-loaders by both combatants, I know of no single instance where troops have gained any signal advantage over Indians in open fight On the other hand, if the Indians gain the advantage, they press it with a most masterful

¹⁶ James McLaughlin, My Friend the Indian, 100-101.

¹⁷ Ibid., 110.

vigor, and there results a massacre, which like that of Custer's command, for a moment appals the country.¹⁸

The board which convened in July, 1881, to test magazine rifles finally submitted its findings to the Secretary of War in September, 1882. Three different rifles were proposed for issuance to troops for trial in actual service. These were the Lee, Chaffee-Reece, and the Hotchkiss rifles and carbines.¹⁹ All of these arms were bolt action magazine weapons. The Hotchkiss and Chaffee-Reese rifles had a tubular magazine in the butt and the Lee rifle had a clip charged magazine loaded by opening the bolt and placing the clip in the magazine receiver below the bolt. Production difficulties slowed the issuance of these weapons, and they were not given to troops until 1884. Interest in magazine weapons was growing, and the single-shot Springfield was acknowledged by many army men to be obsolescent.

The Indian situation remained about the same in 1883 as it had been for the preceding year.²⁰ The Apaches were not yet pacified and had obtained more guns than in previous years. Geronimo, leader of the most ferocious band of hostiles, and many of his warriors carried .45 calibre Springfield rifles and carbines, many of which had been issued to the Indians at their agency.²¹

The increase in the use of machine guns by the army continued in 1883. In that year the Chief of Ordnance issued one Gatling gun and four of the

¹⁸ Richard I. Dodge, Our Wild Indians, 491.

¹⁹ Report of the Secretary of War [1882], I, xviii.

²⁰ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 48 Cong., 1 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1883] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), I, 5.

²¹ George Crook, and Martin F. Schmitt (editor and annotator), General George Crook, His Autobiography (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), 206.

Hotchkiss revolving light cannon, and the equipping of one battery in each regiment as light artillery was pushed nearer to completion. The light batteries were to be equipped with the new machine guns and operate primarily with infantry.

No significant Indian troubles developed in 1884.²² That is not to say that there was no possibility of Indian hostilities, as General Philip H. Sheridan reported that the "situation is extremely sensitive."²³ Sheridan warned that though the major Indian wars were no doubt over, the army would have to maintain a constant vigilance to preserve peace. The general also was in favor of adopting a suitable magazine rifle and carbine as soon as possible for all branches of the military service.²⁴

The Lee, Hotchkiss, and Chaffee-Reese magazine arms were finally issued to troops for testing under active service conditions, but no decision had been reached regarding these weapons by the end of 1884. An improved model of the Gardner machine gun, "designed to co-operate with infantry fire," was recommended to the Secretary of War and subsequently purchased.²⁵ Other machine guns were also issued to troops and were fast becoming standard equipment for all expeditions and frontier commands. The carriage mounted machine gun was destined to replace the "wagon gun" so feared by Indians in the earlier period and proved an effective weapon, psychologically and materially, when used against hostile Indians.

²² House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 48 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1884] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), I, 5.

²³ Ibid., 45.

²⁴ Ibid., 48.

²⁵ Ibid., III, 6.

In 1885, the still dangerous Ute, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians were on the verge of breaking out again, but the dispatch with which the authorities rushed badly needed food supplies to the Indians averted trouble and the frontier settled down to another year of peace.²⁶ The magazine rifles being tested by troops were still on trial in 1885, and no final decision was reached on the adoption of magazine weapons in that year.²⁷

Special attention was given to the subject of machine guns in 1885, when by act of Congress an appropriation for the purpose of procuring more machine guns was turned over to the Ordnance officials. The Chief of Ordnance reported that

Under the appropriation for this purpose the Department has taken steps to secure a number of Hotchkiss, Gardner, and Gatling machine guns, for issue to the service.²⁸

Some minor Indian troubles occurred in 1886, and the army was forced to do a good deal of marching and watching to maintain peace on the frontier. The Apaches led by Geronimo were still a thorn in the side of settlers and soldiers in New Mexico and Arizona, but unceasing pursuit of the hostiles by small detachments of troops finally wore Apache resistance down. The Apaches of 1886 had acquired many more improved arms than their fathers had possessed only a few years earlier. They were described as "fierce and independent, well armed with the best guns and ammunition."²⁹ Geronimo's band

²⁶ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 49 Cong., 1 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1885] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), I, 4-5.

²⁷ Ibid., 30.

²⁸ Report of the Secretary of War [1885], III, xxiv.

²⁹ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 49 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1886] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886), I, 11.

agreed to a final surrender in September, 1886, and with the exile of their last great war chief the dreaded Apaches ceased to be the scourge they had been for the previous twenty-five years.³⁰ The army continued to suppress sporadic Apache troubles for the next few years but never had to cope with any further serious Apache hostilities as in the years before Geronimo's surrender.

Results of the field trials of the Lee, Hotchkiss, and Chaffee-Reese magazine rifles were finally in and tabulated by the beginning of 1886. The Lee arm received the most favorable commendation, but opinion was four to one in favor of retaining the single-shot Springfield, and the army continued to be armed with the old weapons until the 1890's.³¹ More Gatling machine guns were issued to the army during 1886, and the army by this time considered the machine gun no longer as a freak weapon usable only under given conditions but as an essential part of all major expeditions and operational units.

From time immemorial the tribes of the northern plains had indulged in the practice of raids and petty warfare among themselves and their neighbors. In the late summer of 1887, the Crow Indians of the Montana-Dakota region carried on a series of raids against their old enemies, the Blackfeet.³² The Crows had long been friends of the whites, and had assisted the army in almost all of its campaigns against the Sioux and Cheyenne, but these Indian allies of the troops did not seem to understand that the army meant to keep peace on the frontier among their late allies as well as in the case of the erstwhile hostiles.

³⁰ Report of the Secretary of War [1886], I, 13.

³¹ Ibid., III, 4.

³² House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 50 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1888] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888), I, 147.

The Crow raids were reported by the Indian Bureau, and the army was directed to stop this activity at once and to arrest the Crow ring-leaders. The Crows did not take kindly to the proposed arrest of their leaders, and became increasingly unruly toward their own agent, who summoned troops to the agency to forestall an outbreak. In answer to the agent's call,

Colonel Dudley left Fort Custer with troops A, B, D, E, and K, and company B, 3rd Infantry, with a section of Hotchkiss guns, to arrest "Sword Bearer" and the Indians who had fired into the agency building on the night of September 30 [1887]³³

After the troops reached the agency, Sword Bearer and the most unruly warriors gathered in a brush covered grove and defied the authority of the army. Soldiers were deployed to attack the Indians and the Hotchkiss revolving guns were brought to bear on the hostile positions. The Crows prepared to fight.

"Sword Bearer" and another chief dashed out leading from 120 to 150 warriors equipped for battle. The Indians charged but were repulsed and fell back to the timber along the river where they had dug many rifle pits from which they now kept up a constant fire. This fire was returned, and "Sword Bearer" was seen to fall, when all firing quickly ceased.³⁴

This fight was one of the best examples of the efficient use of the new machine guns, such as the Gardner, Gatling and Hotchkiss, in writing a quick finis to Indian resistance in open fighting. Machine guns were thus an important factor in the army's easy victory over the Crows in 1887.³⁵

No significant Indian troubles occurred between the abortive Crow uprising in 1887 and the Sioux, or Ghost Dance War of 1890-91, but far reaching developments were recorded by the army reports of the period. The

³³ Captain R. P. Page Wainwright, "The First Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 171.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Report of the Secretary of War [1888], I, 150.

impact of these developments was not fully felt for many years, yet their beginnings were significant.

In 1886, French ordnance personnel had developed a magazine rifle to handle a small calibre (8 mm.) bullet propelled by modern smokeless powder, and this change was copied by all the powers of the world within fifteen years. Major General of the Army James M. Schofield advocated the change to a small calibre magazine rifle for use in the United States army in his reports for 1888 and 1889, but lack of knowledge of the processing of smokeless powder retarded the adoption of a magazine rifle for American troops until 1892.³⁶ Other military men such as Inspector-General John C. Breckenridge recognized the pressing need to re-arm the army of the United States with magazine rifles and carbines; however, for the reason already stated and because of the inherent conservatism of many high army men the change was delayed until the need was obvious to all but the most obtuse.³⁷

Another development that was destined to play a large part in modern warfare was the invention and production of the Maxim automatic machine gun. In 1890, the Maxim gun was tested by the United States army, but the tests were not considered favorable to the arm and it was given only a luke warm recommendation.³⁸ The Maxim gun was later adopted by the British, Russian, German, Japanese, and several other foreign armies, and has continued in service to the present day only slightly modified from its original form. One

³⁶ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 51 Cong., 1 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1890] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), I, 67.

³⁷ Ibid., 135-136.

³⁸ House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 51 Cong., 2 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1890] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), III, 456.

of the chief objections to the adoption of the Maxim machine gun by our army in 1890 was the fact that it was not well adapted to the use of the large calibre .45 government cartridge. This was true even though the army knew that this cartridge was obsolete and was soon to be replaced by another smaller calibre cartridge for which the Maxim was admirably suited.

Late in 1890, Major General of the Army Schofield reported that there had been no Indian difficulties or danger of uprisings in the period between his report for 1889 and the one for 1890.³⁹ The general either was completely ignorant of the increasingly critical Indian situation in the northern plains region, or he did not wish to report that major Indian hostilities might commence at any moment. The condition of many of the northern tribes as well as tribes in the southwest and mountain areas was in many instances desperate. Year after year the Indians had been deprived of more and more of their privileges and rights. Treaties tended to lose their aspects of protection of Indian rights as white settlement pressed closer on Indian lands and the period of serious Indian troubles of the 1870's receded farther into the past. As time passed, the Indians were treated ever more shabbily by the government, and the decision made in 1890 to cut the beef ration almost in half at the Sioux agencies in the Nebraska-Dakota border area and in other locations on the northern plains was literally the last straw. The cup of the Indian was full, and dangerously close to overflowing.

Toward the end of the 1880's, a self-styled Indian messiah had revealed himself to several groups of Indians in the Southwest. This leader had proposed to show the way to ultimate recovery of the Indian lands and victory over the white encroachers. According to the messiah, at the appointed time

³⁹ Report of the Secretary of War [1890], I, 44.

all the ghosts of Indians who had ever lived would join their living brothers and drive the white man into the sea. From this aspect of the messianic craze, the turbulent Indians who participated in the troubles of 1890-'91 were given the name of "ghost dancers." These overcredulous but often destitute and desperate Indians engaged in exhausting dances, during which those who fainted from the intense exertion supposedly directly contacted the "ghosts" of their ancestors. The excitement stirred up by the ghost dancing and other aspects of the messianic craze swept through almost all of the plains tribes, including the Sioux already mentioned. Indian unrest caused by the messianic movement, the failure of what crops the Indians had planted, and the cutting of subsistence goods supplied the Indians by the government was soon apparent to settlers near the disaffected Indians. Many white settlers and officials of the Indian Bureau were convinced that trouble could only be averted by the presence of troops. The army was summoned to handle a situation that by December of 1890 was very nearly out of hand. Meanwhile, incidents such as the killing of Sitting Bull by the Indian Police, and hysteria developing from Indian scares and rumors increased the tension. All that was needed to set off a major Indian war was a spark, a spark that might be struck by a jittery Indian agent or white settler or by an Indian who had decided to die fighting rather than starve.

While the army was hurrying troops to the Sioux agencies at Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and other localities where hostilities threatened, competent Indian agents, such as James McLaughlin, were doing their utmost to prevent an outbreak that they knew might well prove the most serious in frontier history. Writing in later years of his experiences in the Ghost Dance War, Agent McLaughlin declared: "The winter of 1890-91 [could] have seen in uprising in the Dakotas - perhaps throughout the West - that would have thrown into

insignificance the [Indian] wars of the past."⁴⁰ The numbers of unruly Indians coupled with their almost unanimous possession of Winchester repeaters and other modern arms were matters of grave concern to most of the Indian agents and army officers familiar with the situation. The grave nature of the situation is seen in the following statement:

The Indians were armed with Winchester rifles, and were in a state of starvation and desperation. They could enter the field with 6,000 fighting men, and with the advantage of their knowledge of the country they could fight 6,000 of the best American troops on terms of equality.⁴¹

Evidence of the army's concern is seen in the report of the Major General of the Army for 1891. The General stated that the army believed the situation so grave that it was compelled to concentrate more than one half its strength at the seat of trouble in Dakota.⁴²

After much maneuvering on the part of the Indians and the army, a band of the most insubordinate Sioux were surrounded and led into camp on Wounded Knee Creek on December 28, 1890. The following morning, troops were drawn up in a square surrounding the Indian camp, Gatling and Hotchkiss guns took up their positions on a knoll commanding the camp, and the order was given for troops to enter the hostile camp and disarm the warriors. As the troops advanced upon the Sioux and began to circulate among their wickiups an Indian medicine man jumped to his feet and began to harangue the Sioux. Suddenly, the disheveled medicine man stooped and grasped a handful of loose

⁴⁰ James McLaughlin, My Friend the Indian, 263.

⁴¹ W. Fletcher Johnson, Sitting Bull and the Sioux War of 1890-'91 (No place of publication given: Edgewood Publishing Company, 1891), 526-527.

⁴² House Executive Document No. I, Part 2., 52 Cong., 1 Sess., Report of the Secretary of War [1891] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), I, 55.

dirt. Straightening up, he raised his dust-filled hand over his head and cast its contents to the wind. This was the signal; as a man the blanketed Sioux produced rifles and other weapons from the folds of their blankets and poured a desperate fire into the soldiers. The troops immediately commenced fire. "The Gatling and Hotchkiss guns were trained, and then began a heavy firing which lasted half an hour, with frequent volleys of musketry and cannon." It was a war of extermination now."⁴³ "More than ninety Indians were killed by the deadly fire from the Hotchkiss guns and the unerring aim of the soldiers."⁴⁴ Warriors, women and children withered and fell before the searing and indiscriminate blast of the machine guns and cannon; this was not a battle, it was a slaughter. The Indians stood and fought the troops for as long as they could, and in fact the Winchester-armed Sioux "almost snatched victory from defeat,"⁴⁵ but no enemy could long withstand the fire of the machine guns that swept the Indian camp and the hail of bullets which were poured in on them by the surrounding troops. Many of the Sioux managed to escape to the snow-covered hills and to hide in the numerous gullies and ravines in the area. They were pursued and relentlessly hunted down by the soldiers, and effective Indian resistance was crushed.

Small groups of Sioux still remained hostile after the fight at Wounded Knee. The still insubordinate Indians caused a good deal of trouble in the next few months, even though their numbers were small. On January 5, 1891, a wagon train with a complement of about fifty soldiers and teamsters was attacked by an equal number of Sioux. The repeating weapons of the Indians

⁴³ W. Fletcher Johnson, Sitting Bull and the Sioux War of 1890-'91, 329.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 440.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 437.

forced the whites to assume defensive positions, which they were able to defend as long as they did because of the longer range of the .45 calibre Springfields used by the troops.⁴⁶ The fight ended with the arrival of a large number of troops to reinforce those pinned down by the Sioux. Without reinforcements, the whites in the wagon train might very well have been wiped out by the well-equipped Sioux.

Most of the hostiles had turned themselves in to their agencies and surrendered during the first few days of 1891, and on January 9, 1891, the main hostile camp was surrounded and the Indians forced to surrender. Revolt would have ended in disaster to the surrounded Sioux. Two Gatling machine guns were trained on the Indian camp ready to fire at a moment's notice and a Hotchkiss gun with a four mile range was in position three quarters of a mile from the Sioux bivouac.⁴⁷ By January 15, 1891, all but a few individual Sioux hostiles had returned to the Indian agencies and surrendered in the face of what they now realized were impossible odds. But even though the Sioux recognized their final defeat, their old habit of surrendering only a few of their most worthless weapons was evidenced by the small number and useless character of most of the rifles given up to the soldiers. The surrendered guns

"... were found to consist of simply two short guns, a heavy rifle and a broken carbine, two Sharp's rifles and one Winchester - nine guns in all. This surrender was an evidence that the Indians did not propose to give up all their guns, that they had hidden their best weapons in the hills."⁴⁸

The excitement of the Sioux uprising of 1890- 91 gradually died away.

⁴⁶ W. Fletcher Johnson, Sitting Bull and the Sioux War of 1890-'91, 482.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 484.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 495.

Never again was major Indian warfare threatened on our now closed frontier. A few isolated disturbances occurred in the years following the Ghost Dance War, but most of these were prevented before they got under way or easily stopped before the insurgent Indians made any headway. Possession of Winchester, Remington, Sharp and other modern firearms was no longer a deciding factor in the success of Indian warfare, as the overwhelming preponderance of white settlers in the regions once held inviolate by the Indians made any attempt at Indian resistance sure of failure. In June, 1891, the Moqui Indians of the Southwest were restless and the Indian agent feared for the lives of himself and his subordinates. Troops were summoned, and

Major Wingate, commanding the battalion . . . promptly sent two troops to the rescue, accompanied by Lieutenant Wallace with two Hotchkiss guns, When this force arrived before the village, the Moqui quietly surrendered.⁴⁹

This incident is a good example of the usual mode of handling Indian disturbances in the 1890's and early 1900's. The Indians knew they could no longer contend with the army on anything like an equal footing, and the use of the different machine guns already often mentioned had a great deal to do with this. The cannon had long been the army's ace in the hole in Indian warfare, and now the "medicine guns" invented by Gatling, Gardner, Hotchkiss and others took their places with troops in the field and added a weapons factor that proved one of the final straws of the burden that crushed the Indian and kept him pacified until time and the government could civilize him.

⁴⁹ Major Alfred E. Bates, and Captain Edward J. McClernand, "The Second Cavalry," in Rodenbough and Haskin, Army of the U. S., 192.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Between 1862 and 1891, a revolution had taken place in the tactics, aims, and weapons employed in Indian warfare. In the early period, Indian fighting had been usually delegated to small numbers of troops whose superior weapons, revolvers, rifled muzzle-loading arms, breech-loading carbines and cannon, gave the soldiers a decided advantage over the Indians armed with smooth-bores and primitive weapons. The Indians rapidly obtained good muzzle-loaders and percussion revolvers in the period during and immediately following the Civil War. By the introduction of breech-loading rifles and carbines in the late 1860's, the army was able to regain weapons superiority as seen in the defeat of Red Cloud and his fifteen hundred warriors in July, 1867, by less than fifty soldiers and wood cutters using the new breech-loading arms. Weapons superiority must certainly be accounted a factor in the victory of the army over the Indians in the late 1860's.

In the period between the close of the Civil War and 1873, the army issued many types of improved arms. These included the Spencer repeating carbine, the Sharp carbines, the altered Springfield rifles and many others, but the weapons finally adopted for army issue did not keep pace with civilian arms developments as seen in the Winchester repeaters. The Indians were quick to see the value of the newly developed repeating weapons, and in the period after 1870, they rapidly acquired large numbers of Winchester rifles. They also secured thousands of the Henry and Spencer rifles and carbines abandoned by the army when the Springfield single-shot system was

adopted for all army small arms. The acquisition of repeaters and other breech-loaders by the Indians enabled them to defeat the troops sent against them in the major campaigns of 1876, and forced the army to put forth every effort to defeat the Indians once and for all. Many officials believed that the possession of improved arms by Indians not only increased the effect and seriousness of Indian wars but helped cause them as well.

By the mid-1870's, the Indian Bureau's policy of supplying arms and ammunition for hunting became so apparently ridiculous that some efforts to control the supply of war materials to hostile or potentially hostile Indians were finally undertaken. Neither the problem of allowing the Indian agents to furnish cartridges and guns to their charges nor the problem of the trade in contraband arms were successfully dealt with during the period of the Indian wars. Both were large factors in determining the conduct and seriousness of these wars. The most radical change in army weapons, after the introduction of metallic cartridge breech-loaders, was the gradual acquiring of machine guns and rapid fire weapons, some of which had been used as early as the Civil War. These weapons were used to some extent in the campaigns of the later 1870's, and where they were employed the machine guns were often decisive factors. During the 1880's, there was a marked growth of interest in the new arms, special light artillery batteries were organized and equipped and trained with the Gatling, Hotchkiss, Lowell and Gardner machine guns. Their use against the insurgent Crows in 1887 helped to end the outbreak before it had reached major proportions. The last major Indian battle in frontier history saw the extensive and judicious use of machine guns when Gatlings and Hotchkiss guns mowed down the hostiles at the Battle of Wounded Knee. The Indian had been able to keep abreast or ahead of the army in some aspects of small arms used in frontier warfare, but he could not match the "medicine guns" and cannon of the army.

IMPORTANT CAMPAIGNS AND INDIAN WARS¹

- 1862-67 Sioux Indian War in Minnesota and Dakota
- 1863 '69 War against the Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Kiowa, and Commanche Indians in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Indian Territory
- 1865-68 Indian War in Oregon and Idaho, and Northern California and Nevada
- 1867-81 Campaign against Lipan, Kiowa, Kickapoo, and Comanche Indians and Mexican Border disturbances.
- 1871 Yellowstone Expedition, August 28 to October 25
- 1872-73 Modoc Campaign, November, 1872 to June, 1873
- 1873 Yellowstone Expedition, Dakota, June 4 to October 4
- 1874-75 Campaign against Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Comanche Indians, in Indian Territory, August 1, 1874 to February 16, 1875
- 1874 Sioux Expedition, Wyoming and Nebraska, February 13 to August 19
- 1874 Black Hills Expedition, Dakota, June 20 to August 30
- 1874 Big Horn Expedition, Wyoming, August 13 to October 10
- 1875 Expedition against Indians in Eastern Nevada, September 7 to 27th
- 1876 Powder River Expedition, Wyoming, November 1 to December 31
- 1876-77 Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition, Wyoming and Montana, February 17, 1876 to June 13, 1877
- 1876-79 War with Northern Cheyenne and Sioux Indians, in Indian Territory, Kansas, Wyoming, Dakota, Nebraska, and Montana
- 1877 Nez Perce Campaign, June to October, 1877
- 1878 Bannock Campaign, May to September, 1878
- 1878 Piute Indian Troubles, in Nevada and Idaho
- 1878 Ute Expedition, Colorado, April 3 to September 9
- 1879-80 Ute Indian Campaign in Colorado and Utah, September 21, 1879 to November 8, 1880
- 1890-91 Sioux Indian Disturbances in South Dakota, November, 1890 to January 1891

¹ Theodore F. Rodenbough, and William L. Haskin, editors, Army of the U. S., 706-708.

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These papers contain a wealth of excellent information on arms of the post-Civil War frontier Indian campaigns. They consist of letters, telegrams and reports sent to and from these two leaders of the United States army during the period of the most serious Indian wars. Found in the Phillips collection, University of Oklahoma Library.

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These reports are usually contained in the report of the Secretary of the Interior, but were often published separately from them. No document number is attached to these separate reports. They contain the report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and also numerous papers and reports of minor officials serving among the Indians. Many of these reports include valuable information on arms acquired and used by hostile Indians.

House Executive Document No. 122, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., Official Copies of Correspondence Relative to the War With Modoc Indians in 1872-'73. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874.

This document contains a large number of reports, letters, telegrams

and other papers relative to the Modoc outbreak. Considerable valuable information on weapons used by the troops and the Modocs, and especially on the supplies of war materials available, are contained in many of these papers, most of which were executed by participants in the fighting.

House Executive Document No. I, Part 5., 42 Cong., 3 Sess., Report of the Secretary of the Interior [1872]. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872.

The Secretary of the Interior's report contains that of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Each Indian Bureau agent and official has his report included in the report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. These papers often furnish valuable information on Indian armament in the period of the Indian wars.

Report of the Secretary of War [1863 - 1891]. 102 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864 - 1891.

The report of the Secretary of War was included in the documents comprising the annual message of the President to the Congress, in the period between 1863 and 1891. Each military department, division and bureau has its report included in the War Department report. These are the best sources of information on weapons used in the Indian wars.

III. BOOKS

A. GENERAL ACCOUNTS

Bannerman Sons, Francis, Arms and Military Goods Catalog, 1942. New York: Francis Bannerman Sons, 1942.

This firm's catalog has remained almost unchanged since the 1890's. It contains a mass of good detailed information on United States weapons, and is especially useful for the period 1861 to 1893.

Brady, Cyrus Townsend, Indian Fights and Fighters. New York: The McClure company, 1904.

This book deals with the Indian wars from the Civil War period to the end of the 1870's. Several accounts in it were written for Brady by old Indian fighters and they often furnish reliable information on Indian and army weapons of the period covered.

Downey, Fairfax, Indian-Fighting Army. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941.

Much valuable information on arms is included in this account of army operations against hostile Indians from 1865 to the end of the Indian wars.

Gluckman, Arcadi, United States Muskets, Rifles and Carbines. Buffalo, N. Y.: Otto Ulbrich Co., Inc., 1945.

This is one of the best general treatments of all the small arms in use by the United States army, from its beginnings to the present day. A large amount of reliable and hard-to-find information on weapons, including those of the Indian war period, is found in this book.

Hicks, James E., What the Citizen Should Know About Our Weapons. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1941.

A general survey of weapons employed by United States troops since the earliest times. A modicum of reliable data on weapons of the period 1861 through the Indian war era is included, but only in a general coverage. Contains good handling of the development and use of machine guns.

Priest, Loring Benson, Uncle Sam's Stepchildren, The Reformation of the United States Indian Policy, 1865-1887. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1942.

An excellent appraisal of Indian affairs from 1865 to 1887, including pertinent information on trade in contraband articles such as guns, whiskey and ammunition.

Rodenbough, Theodore F., and Haskin, William L., editors, The Army of the United States. New York: Maynard, Merrill & Co., 1896.

A detailed history of the United States army and its operations. Each regimental history is a separate chapter, usually written by an officer of that regiment who was familiar with much of the material on the Indian wars, as the writing was done only a few years after their cessation. The regimental histories contain much data on army and Indian weapons.

B. MONOGRAPHS

Cleveland, H. W. S., Hints to Riflemen. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1864.

Cleveland's treatise on different rifles and carbines, their relative merits and efficiency, furnishes excellent and reliable information on many of the arms used in the post-Civil War Indian campaigns. The Colt, Spencer, Henry, Sharp and other firearms are thoroughly covered in this early book on breech-loaders and muzzle-loaders.

Hyde, George E., Red Cloud's Folk, A History of the Oglala Sioux. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937.

This is a history of the Oglala Sioux from the earliest times through the period of the Indian Wars. Much valuable material on Indian weapons and their procurement is included.

Johnson, W. Fletcher, Sitting Bull and the Sioux War of 1890-'91. Edgewood Publishing Company, 1891 [No place of publication given].

A contemporary treatment of the Ghost Dance War, and very good for hard-to-get details on weapons used by the army and the Indians. Much of the information was gotten from participants in the uprising.

Smith, Winston O., The Sharps Rifle. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1943.

Though written primarily for gun collectors, this book has a good deal of detailed information on the use of the Sharp arms in the period of 1861 to the early 1880's.

C. MEMOIRS

Dodge, Richard I., Our Wild Indians. Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1833.

Colonel Dodge includes much useful and reliable information on Indian and army weapons and the significance of the differences. This book was written by a man who had spent over thirty years as a frontier army officer. He is still considered one of the all time authorities on the post-Civil War plains Indians.

Hunt, Robert, and Hunt, Frazier, I Fought With Custer. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947.

The "I" in the title refers to Sergeant Windolph, last survivor of the Seventh Cavalry who fought under Major Reno in the Battle of the Little Big Horn. A large part of the book is made up of the old soldier's story and those of other participants, white and red, in the Sioux War of 1876. The authors collected these accounts and synthesized them into a meaningful whole. Several valuable details and facts concerning army and Indian weapons are found in this book.

McLaughlin, James, My Friend the Indian. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926.

McLaughlin wrote the story of his many years as an Indian agent in the northern plains country, and included a good deal of arms information in recounting the events of his long service among the Sioux.

Miles, Nelson A., Personal Recollections and Adventures of General Nelson A. Miles. Chicago: The Werner Co., 1897.

The autobiography of this famous Indian fighter furnishes occasional significant details on Indian and army weapons and the changes which occurred in the post-Civil War era.

Wheeler, Homer W., Buffalo Days. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923.

This work contains a large number of details concerning the weapons used in the Indian wars. As an army officer, Wheeler was an observant participant in many of the Indian campaigns from the mid-1870's to the end of the Indian wars.

THESIS TITLE: Firearms in the Indian Wars - 1862 to 1891

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