

To: Secretary Leroy "JR" LaPlante
The Department of Tribal Relations
302 East Dakota
Pierre, SD 57501

Dear Secretary LaPlante:

I write to make you aware that one of South Dakota's mountains is named after Col. William S. Harney, who knowingly commanded the slaughter of Native American women and children. I invite you to consider—for a moment— some of Thomas Jefferson's language from our treasured Declaration of Independence:

"He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions."

Is it not ironic then that we have memorialized a military commander who violated standards of basic decency that were apparent 80 years earlier? Something so precious as a mountain deserves better. Our country deserves better.

I am Basil Brave Heart, born into the Oglala Nation of Lakota and reside in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, have served in the U.S. Army 187 RCT Korea 1951-1953 U.S. Paratrooper. I come to you as a Combat Veteran who has served his country, and as an Elder of the Oglala Lakota Nation in the Pine Ridge Reservation with a heart felt request on behalf of the Oglala Nation.

The Battle of Blue Water Creek has been well documented in American history: on September 3, 1855, the U.S. Army, as commanded by Col. William S. Harney, attacked and destroyed a Lakota village located three miles north on Blue Creek.

Accounts from Lieutenants under Col. Harney's command tell us how, at 2:00 a.m., they used their long range rifles "to cut down the women and children as they tried to escape." We now know the location of the caves and rock overhangs in the northeast side of the valley where the women took their children to hide from the battle. And in our hearts can feel their anguish as they were found there by the soldiers and were executed by orders given to them by Col. Harney. We know that over a year later more bodies were found on and around that site including the bodies of two female children who were found clinging together in the water nearly two miles from the original camp site.

Today we would see this event for what it is: a massacre that violated basic standards of decency. Even then, it violated the U.S. Military's Rules of Engagement, whereby Col. Harney and Chief Little Thunder had agreed in ostensible good faith that no harm would come to those camped on the Blue Creek that fateful night in 1855. Now we have the MC 362/1 NATO Rules of Engagement to protect those living in the United States from such unspeakable crimes and violence. All civilized societies today respect and protect the lives of innocent women and children in war. Those who do not are rightly referred to as *terrorists*.

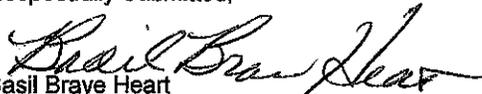
This massacre stands out among others because those who are not aware of its true origins, sees this sacred place as a monument given to honor Col. Harney and as such serves as a constant reminder of this great tragedy.

And so we come to you in good faith with our request and beseech you to help heal this one very deep and profound wound among all Oglala and Brule Lakota Americans.

We ask that the site known today as "Harney Peak" be reclaimed by the indigenous peoples and upon your authority it shall be renamed "Black Elk Peak".

We feel that this small action, facilitated by those with the authority to carry it out, will help bring about a profound sense of healing and of justice to the peoples of the Black Hills and those who respectfully uphold the sacredness therein.

Respectfully Submitted,


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CC: Senator Johnson, SD
Senator Thune, SD
U.S. Representative Noem, SD
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Chronicles of the Blue Water Creek Massacre – September 3, 1855

The following accounts are lifted from the chronicles of many historians who have researched to reveal the true accounts of the Massacre of Blue Water Creek. The intention of this document is to support the letter of appeal to change the name of Mount Harney which was addressed to selected government officials and to the Chairman of South Dakota State Department of Tribal Nation. Many of the citations are from copyrighted documents some with explicit permission of the author. However, since the intention of this document is for individuals to serve as a reference, we thereby exercise the permission of the excerpts from them which may be printed, downloaded, and/or emailed for the purpose of educating those who do not know of this event.

Webster's dictionary defines the word *massacre*, when used as a noun as “the act or an instance of killing a number of usually helpless or unresisting human beings under circumstances of atrocity or cruelty” and when used as a verb, the word is defined as “to violently kill (a group of people): to easily defeat (someone or something)”¹

Indeed, by Webster's definition, what happened at Blue Water Creek on September 3, 1855 is correctly termed as a *massacre*. What's more, there is compelling evidence that Harney was out for vengeance and actively sought out to kill these Oglala and Brule Lakota.

It is very fortunate that scholars of history have diligently recorded and preserved the testimonies of those who participated or witnessed all that took place. We have on good authority that in fact, it all began with a dispute over a cow [or some say an ox) who had become lame while trekking across the plains with a group of Mormons. Around Fort Laramie, the cow was discovered, untethered and roaming freely. To the hungry Lakota, this was an opportunity for food which they did not pass. LT J.L. Grattan, however, took offense at this act and led 29 soldiers from Fort Laramie to the Lakota camp with intention to arrest the guilty party. In the end, negotiations heated, shots were fire and a work broke out resulting in the death of LT Grattan and his men.²

J.P. Dunn, published his book just five years after he witnessed the Fort Laramie battle and gives the following account of the battle which broke out at Fort Laramie leading up to the vengeful attack at Blue Water Creek:

In the late summer of 1851 a large number of Brules, Ogallallas, [Oglala] and Minneconjous were camped below Fort Laramie, waiting for their annual presents [rations]. On August 18th an ox belonging to some Mormon emigrants was taken and killed by a Minneconjou, who was camped with the Brules. The whites said it was stolen, and the Indians that it had given out and been abandoned. The Chief Bear (Mah-to-l-o-wa), chief of the Brules, came to the fort, reported his version of the story to Lieutenant Fleming, commanding, and said that if a detachment were sent for the Indian he would be surrendered. Lieutenant Grattan, with eighteen men and two howitzers, was sent after him. The Indians were camped between Gratiof's and Bordeaux's trading-houses, distant respectively five and eight miles from Fort Laramie, between the Oregon road and the river. The Ogallallas [Oglalas] were nearest the fort and the Brules farthest from it, with the Minneconjous between. The Brule camp was semicircular in form, with the convex side to the river, and was bordered by a slight, abrupt depression, heavily grown with bushes. The Bear came out, but either could not or would not surrender the accused, as he had promised. Grattan then moved forward towards the centre of the camp, where the teepee of the accused stood, with the intention of taking him by force, and as he did so the warriors of the camp and many from the other camps pressed angrily forward and massed around the teepee and in the bushes, to resist the attempt. At this show of resistance, Grattan ordered his men to fire, and their guns were scarcely discharged before their commander and the greater part of themselves fell dead from a return volley, while the remainder were surrounded by a thousand or more of infuriated warriors, and exterminated in an inconceivably short time. Only one man escaped, and he died of his wounds two or three days later. The Indians menaced the fort for a time, but withdrew without accomplishing any damage, and the fort was soon afterwards reinforced by troops from Fort Riley. The Bear was killed in this affair, and Little Thunder succeeded to the chieftainship.³

The following year, General Harney upon orders by the U.S. War Department was dispatched for what the military termed the “Ash Hollow and Cheyenne Expedition”, which led to the massacre at his command. We have several creditable testimonies of Harney's intentions for moving his troops into the heart of Lakota country. Harney was sent for the purpose of avenging the deaths of U.S. Soldiers the prior year. He and his men arrived at Ash Hollow on September 2, 1855 where Little Thunder's Brule' band was camped. Little Thunder and the other Lakota leaders came forward with a white flag to show their intentions for a peaceful communication. Harney, however, refused to speak peacefully with them and he did not shake Little Thunder's

outstretched hand. Instead, as soon as the Lakota leaders left, Harney ordered the infantry to attack the camp. This camp was not one of Lakota warriors, but consisted mostly women and children who were either killed or taken prisoner.²

Turning again to the work of J.P. Dunn, his personal account of events leading to the Blue Water Creek Massacre is described in further detail.³

"Here information was received that the hostile Brules were encamped in force on Bluewater Creek (Me-ne-to-wahpah), a stream on the north side of the Platte and two miles above Ash Hollow. General Harney at once prepared for an attack. Colonel Cooke, the former commander of the Mormon battalion, was sent at three o'clock in the morning, with four companies of cavalry, to cut off their retreat. Under the guidance of Joe Tesson, an old trapper, the command approached the creek several times, but found a succession of villages for four miles up the stream. About sunrise they succeeded, without attracting attention, in reaching a position half a mile above the upper village, in the bed of a dry gulch which opened to the creek. At half-past four Harney moved forward with the infantry. As he approached the lower village, the Indians struck their lodges and began retreating up the creek, while Little Thunder came forward and began a parley."

Please note here three important points. 1) Harney and his men are assessing potential risk and formulating their strategy for an attack. 2) The Lakota are aware of this activity and they begin to move out of that area in a proactive movement to avoid violence. And most importantly 3) Little Thunder (known and respected among his people for being a strong advocate for peace) came forward in an act of peace and good faith to began a parley with Harney.

Dunn's eye-witness testimony lends valuable insight and reflects what we know to be the public opinion of 1855:

"To this Harney was not averse, knowing that their retreat was cut off. He told the chief that his warriors had insulted our citizens and murdered our troops, and now, these warriors, whom he said he could not control, must be surrendered or they must fight. While they were talking, a commotion among the more distant Indians announced to the soldiers that the cavalry had been discovered. Little Thunder returned to his warriors, and, without waiting for any answer to his demand, Harney advanced, firing. At the first volley the dragoons rode out of the defile and charged down the valley. As they came in sight, the infantry gave one wild yell and dashed forward. The Indians saw their danger and fled towards the bluffs on the west side of the valley, pursued by the infantry, while the cavalry directed their course to cut off the fleeing Indians.

The battle then became a chase, the Indians urging their fresh ponies to their utmost speed, and throwing away everything that could hamper their flight. The dragoons pursued them from five to eight miles, until scattered and far beyond the support of the infantry; they then turned back to camp. In this engagement the Indians lost eighty-six killed, of whom a number were women and children, five wounded, and seventy prisoners, women and children, besides fifty horses and mules captured, a large number killed, and all their provisions, robes, camp utensils, and equipage destroyed. In the camp was found a lot of the plundered mail, some of the clothing taken at the Grattan massacre, and two white women's scalps. The loss to the troops was four killed and seven wounded.

Such a dreadful blow had never before been struck at the plains Indians...³

Another eye witness account to this war crime comes from one of the men in Harneys campaign. The Blue Water Creek Massacre [aka The Battle of Ash Hollow] was Lieutenant Gouverneur Kemble Warren's first experience in combat. His role was to survey the lands west of the Mississippi for the purpose of surveying a route for the transcontinental railroad. From his journal entries and his report to the U.S. Department of War, we find his chilling testimony.

"I aided in bringing the wounded women and children who were found near the place to which the Indians first fled," Wrote Lieutenant Gouverneur Kemble Warren after the battle at Ash Hollow on 3 September 1855. This official report revealed little of the emotions apparent in Warren's hurriedly written journal:

"The sight on the top of the hill was heart rendering – wounded women and children crying and moaning, horribly mangled by the bullets. Most of this had been occasioned by these creatures taking refuge in holes in the rocks and armed Indians sheltering themselves in the same places. These later fired upon our men killing 2 men and wounded another of the Artillery Company. Our troops then fired in upon their position. Two Indian men were killed in the hole and 3 children, 2 of them in their mother's arms. One young woman was wounded in the left shoulder the ball going in above and coming out below her arm. I put her on my horse. Another handsome squaw was badly wounded just above her left knee and the same bullet wounded her baby in the right knee. Her case interested me much she cried so much, and was continually turning to her babe and singing in the most distressing tones "tu-kee-e-e-e-e Chick-a-see-e-e-e with sobs and sighs. Her words mean "O god my poor child." Her father has also been killed. I had a litter made and put her and the child upon it. I found another girl of about 12 years lying with her head down in a ravine and apparently dead observing her breath I had a man take her in his arms she was shot through both feet. I found a little boy, shot through the calves of his legs and through his hams. I took in my arms he had enough strength left to hold me around the neck, with his piteous load we proceeded down the hill and placing them on the bank of the Blue Water, I made a shelter to keep off the sun and bathed their wounds in the stream. This same office was performed for those brought in wounded by the others in the morning. One little girl shot in the right breast, a boy in the thigh another in his arm. A poor Oglallah[Oglala] woman was shot badly in the shoulder by a dragoon after the fight was over he saw her concealed in the grass and mistook her for a man. This woman and the one I brought down the hill on my horse were in some way left behind. [...] The feeling of sympathy for the wounded women and children and deep regret for their being so,

I found universal. [...] [Journal entry dated Tuesday Sept 4th 1855] The mounted force under Col. Cooke were sent out this morning to scout and complete the gathering of the Plunder. I went with him and had an opportunity to perfect my sketch. There was no evidence of any Indians having returned. Genl Harney moved camp from Ash Hollow to mouth of Blue Water encamped on north side of the Platte days march 3 miles... The wounded baby died this morning its mother does nothing but cry and moan and as my tent is near the hospital tents it distresses me greatly."⁴

As we reach through the annals of our shared history to look beyond the emotional impact of both cultures, we strip down to what is factual evidence and transcends from a massacre to a blatant *War Crime*. Given the fact that this particular region of the Black Hills has been considered as the center of the Lakota universe, it is a travesty to put upon such a sacred mountain the name of the man responsible for such an act of genocide.

People from all cultures still seek answers as to why the mountain in Ash Hollow bears the name of General Harney. Lydia Whirlwind Solder, an accomplished author, historian and resident of Rosebud Reservation wrote of her experience when visiting the Ash Mountain Museum in search of the Blue Water Creek Massacre site. She of course knew where the site was, but we can gather from her article her visit there was to pay homage to those who lost their lives on that 3rd day of September in 1855

In 1999, Lydia Whirlwind Solder writes for the Lakota Country Times newspaper a most compelling article titled "An account of the Blue Water Creek Massacre". She tells of her visit to the Ash Mountain Museum where a curator agreed to take Ms. Whirlwind to the site of the Blue Water Creek Massacre and gives Lydia a more in-depth view of the battle ground. Lydia gazed at the hills around the valley where the soldiers surrounded Little Thunder's camp. She wept for the mothers who had tried desperately to hide their children along the bank under overhanging foliage. As she stepped when she stepped into the beautiful Blue Water Creek, Lydia grieving the dead who's bodies were found in the caves over a year later. Her heart cried as she recalled the bodies of two little girls who were found clinging to one another in water two miles from the original camp site. She wondered if the body count included the babies whose mothers tried to protect with their own bodies. "...did they count those who were mortally wounded and died from their wounds at a later day?"

In respect to Little Thunder and Spotted Tail who fought to protect the women and children she writes:

"They were influential, prominent and established formidable warriors, both were powerful physically, handsome and stood well over 6 ft tall. They were both seriously wounded by gunshot and saber that day at Blue Water but survived. [...]

Little Thunder died about 30 years later but will never be forgotten for his leadership, wisdom, bravery, and attempts to save his people. It is important for all of us Sicangu to acknowledge and honor this great leader.

Spotted Tail was the last true Chief of the Sicangu Oyate. He never forgot the death of his relatives at Blue Water and tried to

establish ways to save his people.

[...] I attended a Bilingual Conference several years ago and met a Nakota elder from Canada who told me his grandfather told him of Spotted Tail coming to Carlyle and talking to the students.[...] he was a great leader who used his intelligence and diplomacy to save his people.

He knew the importance of education. He knew the Lakota were strong people and that they had always adapted and survived the challenges that faced them. Most important is to know that we as descendants of Blue Water Creek massacre have a proud history and know that the last true Chief of the Sicangu Oyate was Spotted Tail.⁵

Eli Paul, notable author and historian, first visited the battlefield along Blue Water Creek in 1977. His book (Blue Water Creek and the First Sioux War, 1854-56) gives accounts by participants of both the Grattan and Blue Water Creek Massacres. "A goal of this book," Paul writes in the preface, "has been to find and use new sources of Lakota history, as well as to distill old accounts, in order to tell this story thoroughly, concisely, and fairly." This brilliantly researched book incorporates statements from Man Afraid of His Horses, who tried to reason with Grattan; Big Partisan, who saw his friend Conquering Bear die; and Little Thunder himself.

In his book, Mr. Paul points out a very sobering fact regarding military tactics in the era of American Indian history:

"The longer term significance of the First Sioux War is that, no matter the commander, his personality, or the decade, the destruction of Indian villages continued to prove an effective military tactic. It remained the goal and the practice, not the exception, even after the Lakota nation was broken."⁶

While it is important that we find ways to heal, it is also equally important that we not forget the events which shaped the landscape of our culture(s) and shared history. There can not be healing without a certain amount of justice.

We do not want to attach the name of a recognized War Criminal on a place so sacred it is considered to be the center of the universe for the Lakota people.

It has often been said of the Jewish Holocaust that we should never forget the horrific price paid by the Jewish people. No one would dare to argue the tragic circumstances in the outrageous and heinous crimes. Its shocking to find there are people in today's world who believe the Holocaust never happened. Once the survivors have all died, and if we dare to forget these tragic accounts of gas chambers and torture and prejudice against the Jews, then we teeter dangerously upon another era who may repeat these horrors again.

So would it be a surprise to anyone reading this document that Adolf Hitler studied the history of the United States and the war it waged against its Indigenous People of America to form his plans for the genocide of the Jewish people? Pulitzer Prize-winning author, John Toland, notes in his book *Adolf Hitler* (pg.202)

Hitler's concept of concentration camps as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history. He admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the wild west; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's extermination—by starvation and uneven combat—of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity.

He was very interested in the way the Indian population had rapidly declined due to epidemics and starvation when the United States government forced them to live on the reservations. He thought the American government's forced migrations of the Indians over great distances to barren reservation land was a deliberate policy of extermination. Just how much Hitler took from the American example of the destruction of the Indian nations is hard to say; however, frightening parallels can be drawn. For some time Hitler considered deporting the Jews to a large 'reservation' in the Lubin area where their numbers would be reduced through starvation and disease.⁷

Hitler was quick to point out how it was due to the lack of public awareness of the American Genocide which influenced his choices.

Are we doomed to repeat this travesty against our Indigenous People of America in future generations? The truth is that we never fully stopped, for how many now remember 'The Long Walk' of the Navajos, or 'The Trail of Tears' of the Cherokee except by their name references?

We are taught from Kindergarten our American Forefathers and we so deeply respect the men and women of our Military for the sacrifices they and their families have made to keep America free. We keep these things in our hearts and prayers so those who gallantly fought and lost their lives will not have died in vain.

So please do not forget these brave men and women of the Indigenous People of America who *also* fought and died for their rights which the U.S. Government still represses. Do not forget the little children and innocents who lost their lives in the crossfire of wars for which they did not play any part.

The elders of long ago: Crazy Horse, Wovoka, Chief Joseph, Sitting Bull, Black Elk, Little Thunder, Spotted Tail, No Ears, American Horse, Chief Gall, Red Cloud, Rain in the Face... the wisdom they imparted to us all is just now being realized.

It is a debt we owe to them to do what we can to preserve their honor and to exonerate the name of Harney from the sacred mountain.

"The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells *Wakan-Tanka* , [Great Mystery] and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. This is the real peace, and the others are but reflections of this. The second peace is that which is made between two individuals, and the third is that which is made between two nations. But above all you should understand that there can never be peace between nations until there is known that true peace, which, as I have often said, is within the souls of men." Black Elk - 1953

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