

Indiana National Guard OCS visits Battlefield Museum

Future generation of officers learn from Custer's successes and failures

by Andrew Bryant, 2010 Custer Battlefield Museum Intern

The U.S. Cavalry School is the facilitator for military groups that want to come to Montana to be trained in the complete United States cavalry experience. The U.S. Cavalry School has come to the Little Big Horn Battlefield and Garryowen for several years during the week leading up to the anniversary of the Battle to conduct an eight-day course, "Custer's Last Ride," where they bring history, horsemanship, and the Western adventure to life. This year, the U.S. Cavalry School will be visited by the History Channel at the Little Bighorn Reenactment on June 25-27, on the Real Bird Loop at Garryowen.

The Custer Battlefield Museum was host to twenty officer candidates of the Indiana National Guard, under the command of Colonel Paul Grube of the 138th Regiment from Indiana's National Guard's Camp Atterbury Training Institute. The museum's director Chris Kortlander conducted a private tour, and provided them with the opportunity to view some artifacts from the Battle of the Little Big Horn not on exhibit, such as the rifle of White Man Runs Him, who was one of Custer's Crow scouts to survive.



Colonel Grube brought the officer candidates to Garryowen as part of a curriculum program to study Custer's Battle at the Little Big Horn Battlefield. The Colonel said, "It is important for a new generation of military officers to learn from past military successes and failures. While the weapons and technology of

warfare have changed greatly since the time of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, many lessons can be learned from the tactics and strategy utilized by Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer. Understanding what tactics were successful and what mistakes were made at the Little Big Horn will assist modern officers to better manage their combat situations without repeating the mistakes that Custer made."

The visit also focused on some of the similarities between the Battle at the Little Big Horn and current military operations in Afghanistan. For example, the landscape of Montana parallels what officers will face in Afghanistan. Colonel Grube stated that he wanted to move the officers to unfamiliar surroundings (Montana) so that they could be exposed to terrain that they would not normally encounter. Being in a setting similar to Afghanistan helped the officers to conceptualize maneuvering in this type of environment. Another example is that ground troops in Afghanistan are faced with many of the same issues that Custer encountered with regard to enemy forces. Lt. Colonel Custer was confronted by many different Native American tribes. Similarly in Afghanistan, there are also numerous native factions involved. Colonel Grube explained how the difficulties

faced by Custer in determining who the enemy was are the same challenges facing our troops today in Afghanistan. The lesson learned here is that it is essential to have accurate military intelligence to be successful.

"Since the Custer Battlefield Museum was built in 1995, we have hosted numerous United States and foreign military divisions that come to the battlefield to study Custer's grave mistakes. Examining battle strategy on the actual battleground obviously has a tremendous impact on military personnel. It brings home the relationship between terrain and tactics in a way that classroom study can't," said Chris Kortlander, the museum's director.

This is the first visit for Indiana National Guard Officers Candidate School, but is one of several military groups that visit the Custer Battlefield Museum and Garryowen each year to study the history and military tactics of the most well-known battle of the West.

Colonel Grube remarked that the Custer Battlefield Museum was an "exceptional experience" for the officer candidates, and in the future he said that he plans to include the Custer Battlefield Museum at Garryowen for the full military historical experience.