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GARRYOWEN - Historical and modern warfare merged Sunday as cavalry soldiers rode horseback in a re-enactment of the Battle of the Little Bighorn after their present-day counterparts parachuted over the site.



Members of the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne jumped out of huge C-130 transport planes.

The modern soldiers later converged on the Real Bird family re-enactment of Custer's Last Stand. They forded the Little Bighorn River, emerging with their government-issued fatigues soaked to the thighs. The soldiers fell into formation in five rigid lines following their company guidons, red and white banners, into the re-enactment area.

The soldiers arrived just as the re-enactment narration discussed the U.S. government's treaty era with tribes. They were greeted with applause by the crowd that packed the grandstands for the third and final day of this year's performances.

The reenactment takes place on the Real Bird family ranch adjacent to the original battle area which is now Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

Organizers of the jump, in which 60 soldiers wafted to ground under khaki-colored parachutes, said it was the largest gathering of U.S. Cavalry personnel on the site since the Battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25, 1876.

The soldiers are members of the 1st Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment of the 18th Airborne Corps. The 82nd Airborne is a part of the 18th which is based in Fort Bragg, N.C. Known as a "staff ride," the paratroopers who made the jump are all leadership of the 1st of the 73rd, 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne.

Col. Christopher Gibson said the soldiers had a great jump and added "what an historical place to conduct an Airborne operation."

"We are very honored to be among the warriors that are here today and all veterans," Gibson said. "All veterans, who came before us and by their example showed us the way and gave us the freedoms we have today."

Modern day scouts, like Gibson and the other cavalry members, are the lineage of Indian warrior scouts. Although today's cavalry is seldom on horseback, they maintain the mental and physical toughness, and are smart, courageous and tenacious, just as their military forbearers were, he said.

Gibson thanked the crowd for attending the reenactment. "Your attendance here today makes us, I suspect, kindred spirits united in the pursuit of freedom."

The soldiers will spend the next few days in the area, visiting historical battle sites on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservations. They will be able to learn from battlefields that are basically unchanged from when fighting took place there in 1876.

After addressing the crowd, Gibson said the group has been taken with the "hospitality and warmth" of the people and communities, along with the beauty of the country.



"It's a place where there was once strife and there now is unity," he said. "Unity and patriotism and a warrior spirit."

(Photos by Lauren Kelly, Copyright, 2009, Custer Battlefield Museum)

