

# Snake River Brewing Custer's Last Ale

Jackson, WY  
snakeriverbrewing.com



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BREWING

No one ever gets to witness the full extent of their legacy as their words and actions may carry on for centuries after they're gone. It seems unlikely that George Armstrong Custer (1839-1876) would have ever guessed that he'd be more commonly remembered for his actions during the Battle of the Little Bighorn than for his lengthy military career, or that the battle itself would eventually become known as "Custer's Last Stand", and he certainly had no idea that it would end up being commemorated by Custer's Last Ale from Snake River Brewing in Jackson, WY.



Custer's Last Stand, painted by Edgar Paxson, 1899

The Battle of the Little Bighorn, also known as the Battle of the Greasy Grass, was fought along the banks of the Little Bighorn River in the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana Territory on June 25th and 26th, 1876. At the time, the U.S. was involved in the Great Sioux War of 1876 which saw the U.S. military battle against Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Indians. The war started after gold was discovered in the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory which caused an influx of white settlers who began to encroach on Native American land. The entire war mostly involved small skirmishes and ended with the Agreement of 1877 which established a number of Indian reservations.

In May 1876, U.S. Army regiments started to move eastward from the western side of the Montana Territory and westward from the Dakota Territory, including the 7th Cavalry Regiment that was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Custer. The unit was mostly made up of former soldiers, many of whom had been stationed at Fort Riley, KS. Custer himself was a graduate of West Point and had served directly under Union General George McClellan during the Civil War. He attained the rank of general at the very young age of 23 and led his troops (in his famously aggressive manner) in many of the Civil War's most famous battles. Custer even commanded the Dakota Territory expedition that led to the discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 and the eventual settlement of western South Dakota by non-native people.

In the midst of the Great Sioux War, many of the Great Plains Indians, including the Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne, were being relocated to reservations. The 7th Cavalry, as well as the other units, were marching on orders to corral and suppress any Indians in the Dakota and Montana Territories that they viewed as

*From the Brewer: This beer is an English pale ale, full bodied and copper colored. The hop flavor and aroma are strong and assertive. Caramel malt and English yeast produce a nutty and fruity character. Dry-hopping with Centennial and Cascade hops in the conditioning phase completes the package. ABV 6%, IBU 45  
Ted & Noa Staryk - Owners*

hostile. On June 25, Custer became aware of a large Native American settlement along the Little Bighorn River and, at the same time, the Indians also became aware of the 7th Cavalry. Feeling that the element of surprise had been lost, Custer ordered an immediate attack. He split his regiment into three groups: one led by Captain Frederick Benteen, another led by Major Marcus Reno, and the third led by Custer.

Reno's battalion charged first but decided to dismount before they attacked, forming a skirmish line. They were met by a huge force of mounted Cheyenne and Lakota warriors who quickly overwhelmed the soldiers. Reno's men were forced to retreat into some trees and then up the banks of the river, losing one-fourth of the battalion in the process. Benteen's troops attempted to reinforce Reno's battalion but were also met with heavy fighting, leaving them pinned down and helpless. Custer's group then attempted to ford the river and attack from the opposite side but they were met with stiff resistance from Indian sharpshooters who were then followed by hundreds of mounted warriors. The Indians, led by Lakota Chief Crazy Horse, outflanked Custer's men and the battalion was forced to make a stand.

Nearly surrounded, Custer's soldiers initially put together a strong defense but Crazy Horse and his fellow Lakota leader White Bull (nephew of Sitting Bull) staged a full-on attack that broke through Custer's front lines and led to pandemonium among his troops. Many soldiers reportedly dropped their weapons and ran toward the knoll where Custer and about 40 of his men were making a stand. As they ran, the Indians struck them down while those who made it to "Custer's Last Stand" fared little better. In the end, every single soldier in Custer's battalion was killed. After the massacre, the Indians regrouped and again attacked Reno and Benteen's men, and the battle continued until U.S. military reinforcements arrived, at which point the Indians realized that they were outnumbered and they packed up and left.

Some estimates claim that as many as 5,000 Native American warriors were on hand for the Battle of the Little Bighorn but most historians feel that a number closer to 2,000 is probably more accurate. U.S. forces had no more than 700 men, about 210 of whom were in Custer's battalion. In total, 268 U.S. soldiers were killed and another 55 were wounded, six of whom later died from their injuries, while anywhere from 30 to 300 Indians were killed and as many as 160 more were wounded. Custer and his men became national heroes to many while others felt the incident was an example of violence that was getting out of control. The U.S. Government's response was to intensify attacks against the Great Plains Indians which eventually led to their surrender. The battle was one of the most significant defeats ever to the U.S. Army by Native American forces and has now found a place as one of the most remembered moments in American history.



The Custer Fight (from the Indians' point of view), painted by Charles Russell, 1903