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***Review of Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle: The Little
Big Horn Reexamined* by Richard Allan Fox, Jr**

Mark F. Baumler

Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

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Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle: The Little Big Horn Reexamined. Richard Allan Fox, Jr. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. Maps, figures, photos, notes, references, and index. xviii + 411 pp. \$29.95 .

Already the subject of official inquiry, interviews, innumerable articles, books, symposia, movies, recreations, demonstrations, and undoubtedly more than one barroom fight—one could legitimately ask: is there anything new left to be said about Custer's "Last Stand" at the battle of the Little Big Horn? To the delight of some and the dismay of others, this book answers forthrightly in the affirmative and it does so convincingly.

Fox's contribution to previous efforts (both scholarly and otherwise) derives from the field of archaeology—a relative newcomer to the discussion surrounding the events of June 25, 1876. Using the material remains of the battle (bullets, cartridge cases, and grave markers), Fox concentrates on constructing what happened step-by-step during the course of the conflict. In doing so, he leads the reader carefully and skillfully through the artifactual data and the inferences necessary to bring meaning to these mute objects. While his immediate goal is to deduce the behavior and movements of combatants on that fateful day, it is also his intent to show more broadly why the study of artifactual remains and those of historical accounts, "archaeography" and historiography respectively—should be linked as "different ways of knowing" the past. Historians may occasionally take exception with, and my fellow archaeologists feel some embarrassment over, the diligence with which Fox presses this issue in the book—but it is exactly this point which most needs to be made to the respective disciplines and to those interested in Custer's "Last Stand" as both myth and reality.

The proof of this is in the result. Fox's archaeological and historical synthesis of the battle of the Little Big Horn presents an entirely original assessment of combat positions and the sequence of events, as well as new perspectives on the behavior of soldiers and Indians alike. He does this systematically and in sufficient detail to allow inspection—ordering and evolving his evidence and arguments over five sections in the book. Part One begins with opening statements that provide readers much of the substance and character of what will come. In Part Two, Fox turns to the unique methods and data which allow inferences of behavior from battlefield remains before crafting a scenario based initially on artifact distributions and subsequently, in Part Three, on a combined consideration of archaeological evidence and historical accounts (especially Sioux and Cheyenne testimonies). Having made his case, Parts Four and Five explore how this new picture of events has direct bearing on reconstructing strategy and determining why Custer not only lost the battle but also his life and those of some 210 cavalymen with him. Contrary to fatalistic notions of a unified, defiant defense against overwhelming odds, Fox sees telltale signs of offensive maneuvers, tactical disintegration, and ultimately disarray and death.

This is a scholarly treatment (revision of a doctoral thesis) that should readily find an audience with serious Custer researchers who are familiar with the battlefield geography and the inherently conflicting accounts of what happened. It is also an important contribution to an as-yet-to-be-unified body of literature on the study of historic battles and battlefields in general. Fox's deliberate and straightforward style, despite some involved arguments and an occasional lapse into jargon, is accessible to laypersons as well. Indeed, with its combined consideration of both archaeological and historical evidence, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle* may be the most comprehensive and reliable introduction available to date on the subject of what happened at the battle of the Little Big Horn, if not why. To be sure, the controversy will continue—even more so perhaps with this open invitation for other archaeologists to reinterpret his data—but I daresay the debate has been elevated significantly by Fox's efforts. Mark F. Baumler, *Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.*