

Contexts for Conflict

*Conceptual Tools for
Interpreting Archaeological
Reflections of the North Platte
Campaign of February 1865*

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War is a significant human activity. It molds the lives of individuals and communities. It impacted human affairs and has unquestionably shaped human history. It is also associated with distinctive material culture that easily attracts the attention of modern audiences. Given all of this, it is hardly surprising that warfare and conflict have emerged in recent years as a focus of modern archaeological research (Scott and McFeaters 2011). But the archaeological study of warfare is not easy. Whether it occurs in the North American Great Plains or anywhere else, war is complex. It involves the actions of individuals who use weapons and training to engage in combat with others. Combatants always draw on the knowledge and resources of others. They usually operate in groups and use cooperation and organization to amplify individual efforts. Such martial groups leave their traces in distributions that reflect their organization and patterned practice. They may operate from specially prepared facilities or in open country. In either case, those contexts influence their actions. Their activities are marked by distinctive assemblages that include intentionally assembled arsenals. Such traces are to be seen where combat occurred, but they are more widely distributed because they take preparation and investment that has to begin before combat. At the highest level, war is also guided by broadly shared objectives that transcend individual goals. Laying the groundwork for war, undertaking the training, the

arming, and the organization it requires, and deciding how to proceed are all societal undertakings.

Archaeologists see war at all of these scales and a synthetic understanding of war requires that they all be investigated. But because they manifest themselves in very different kinds of materials records, the scale differences at which war operates present archaeologists with technical and interpretive challenges. To help archaeologists recognize combat and interpret evidence of the diverse activities that contribute to warfare, we (Bleed and Scott 2011) drew on modern military doctrine to develop a conceptual model that archaeologists can use to organize and interpret the warfare's material record. The goal of this chapter is to present that model to Plains archaeologists and to encourage the conceptual investigation of warfare and conflict on the Plains. War certainly had major impacts on the history and distribution of communities of the Great Plains. The Plains also present a rich body of information that illustrates how battlefield behavior observed in archaeological assemblages can be interpreted at higher social and political levels. In this as in so many other areas, the Great Plains provide a stimulating context for broad anthropological investigation.

BATTLES OF THE NORTH PLATTE CAMPAIGN

Fighting in the North Platte valley in 1865 followed the November 29, 1864, destruction of Black Kettle's village of Cheyenne (McDermott 1996, 2003; Greene and Scott 2004) by a regiment of Colorado Volunteers. In the wake of that assault, a large community of Cheyenne, Lakota, and Arapaho coalesced and moved toward the security of the isolated Sandhills and the Black Hills. With limited opposition, this group attacked Julesburg, Colorado, and ranches and other facilities to avenge the massacre and to gather resources. The mobile community numbered some 2,000 to 3,000. They reached the North Platte in early February, 1865, with a substantial store of captured arms and resources. By no later than February 5, they established a camp at the headwaters of the spring-fed Rush Creek, now known Cedar Creek. For a couple of days the Rush Creek camp appears to have been the operational base from which fighters attacked Mud Springs, a telegraph station and watering stop some eight miles to the east. The small US volunteer military force at Mud Springs grew as units arrived from Fort Mitchell (Nebraska) and Fort Laramie (Wyoming). By February 8 Indian warriors broke off their attack and the Native community left their secure camp to continue a northward journey. On February 8 and 9, warriors covering their community's

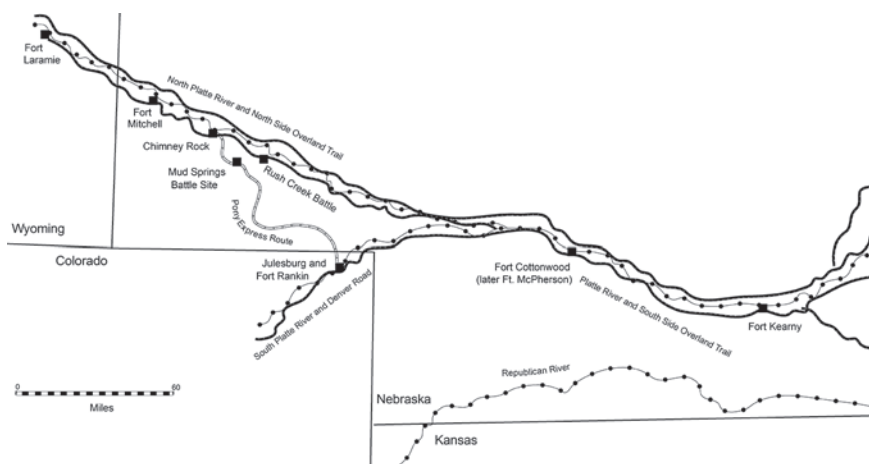


FIGURE 14.1. *Overland trails and military posts along the trail in 1865. Map by the authors.*

move north met US volunteer troops who had moved on from Mud Springs. This engagement, where Rush Creek meets the North Platte, has come to be called the Battle of Rush Creek (figure 14.1).

Published results of archaeological investigations at both Mud Springs (Bleed and Scott 2009) and Rush Creek (Scott et al. 2011) need only to be summarized here to show that although these engagement involved the same forces and were separated by only a short distance and a mere few days, they offer very different archaeological appearances.

The Mud Springs Station presented Cheyenne warriors with an attractive target. On February 4, 1865, it was occupied by nine troopers from the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, telegrapher Richard Ellsworth, and four civilian cowboys ensconced in a log structure built between a hill and the low ground of a spring. Their corral was full of horses and cattle. Indian fighters were well armed and from the outset there was considerable shooting. The station defenders shot from loopholes made in the station wall but Indian fighters were able to use the terrain to approach their position. Early in the fight, the defenders loosed their stock, hoping that would redirect the attention of the Indian attackers. This plan worked. When the corralled stock was free, most Indian attackers left the station in a melee aimed at capturing horses and cattle. Relief forces, composed of elements of the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry and Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, arrived on February 5, first from the short-lived base known as Fort Mitchell and a few hours latter from Fort Laramie. By the 6th more than 200 troopers were holed

up in and around the station. Initially, the two sides engaged in essentially individual contests between fighters who crept close and shot at one another in “bo-peep” fighting, springing up for a quick shot before quickly retreating. The two sides were within 100 yards of one another and fought over the same ground. After US forces charged and secured the hill south of the station, they excavated a rifle pit that gave them a broad view of the approach to the surrounding area.

Archaeological residues of the Mud Springs fight were recovered in 2006 by systematic metal detection along with individual discoveries recorded with GPS technology. The battlefield has been frequently visited by relic collectors, but the 1865 fight was reflected by an assemblage of some 34 cartridges, cases, and bullets from seven different gun types, indicating both Indian and volunteer actions. These materials were found near the station and intermixed on and around the hill to its south, reflecting the fact that the two sides had crossed back and forth across the same ground.

The cavalry column that moved out of Mud Springs on February 8 included some 180 mounted soldiers, several wagons, and a single 12-pounder mountain howitzer. They located the abandoned site of the Rush Creek camp and followed the trail of the Indian community toward the north. As they approached the North Platte, warriors from the Indian party, which had been temporarily halted on the north side of the river, crossed the frozen surface and the battle was begun.

Historic accounts suggest that the two sides exchanged gunfire until late on the ninth of February, but archaeological evidence indicates that the two sides were *not* closely engaged. In fact, recovered materials, including 136 cartridges, cases, and bullets, as well as evidence of at least two cannon shots, indicate that the two sides held positions that were largely stationary and separated from one another, although not completely fixed. For most of the conflict the sides maintained a healthy distance, ranging from 200 to 1,000 m. The fight ended when Indian fighters disengaged and rejoined their home community on the north side of the river and the troopers took the opportunity to march back to their home bases.

Mud Springs and Rush Creek illustrate the potential of modern battlefield archaeology to expose the details of past conflicts. We know that they, as historic events, were closely related. That information is supported by the archaeological observation of cartridge cases from the two battle sites that were fired by the same three Spencer rifles and Ballard carbines. Archaeological distributions at the two battle sites, however, show that they were fought very differently. The challenge they present is explaining their differences.

LEVELS OF WAR

In the Plains as in other regions of the world conflict archaeologists have been drawn to both “battlefields” and other facilities that appear have been shaped by martial activities. Fortified communities and historical “forts,” bases, and depots fall into these categories. At these sites, conflict archaeologists have developed techniques and methods to address how combat occurs. Archaeological consideration of the organization and management of war is beginning to be investigated, but using archaeology to assess contextual aspects of conflict and warfare are challenging, since their link to material evidence is at best indirect. Beyond that, archaeologists have not yet developed a refined vocabulary or conceptual inventory for the synthetic study of warfare.

By contrast, military leaders have carefully conceptualized the range of actions involved in undertaking combat. Military science, the discipline developed to guide military conduct, rests on long history and has deep intellectual roots. The rich and complex literature on military operations certainly should not be used simplistically, but concepts and terms army theoreticians have developed to prepare for and conduct military operations are applicable to archaeological analysis of battlefields and other military sites. The US Army maintains a regular series of training publications designed to make the conceptual basis of military activities available to new personnel. These publications describe the range of actions involved in preparing for and conducting combat in clearly defined, concrete terms. Since they are intended to guide the planning and execution of military activities, these manuals treat combat at all levels, from the specifics of individual and small-group actions to the general formation of military policy. They offer clear conceptualization of the range of activities involved in organizing and conducting combat. Since they treat both concrete realities and conceptual constructs, these manuals can address observable features and support inferential interpretations of archaeological materials.

LEVELS OF WAR: STRATEGY, OPERATIONS, AND TACTICS

As laid out in Field Manual *FM 3-0, Operations* (Department of Army, February 2008), any action undertaken in support of a military mission can be described as an “operation.” Obviously, this is a generic term. To help commanders visualize the wide range of operations involved in the military mission, current doctrine presents war in terms of three levels: the *strategic*, *operational*, and *tactical*. To emphasize that military actions are interconnected, *FM 3-0* presents these levels and the range of activities undertaken by the military as tiers in a graphic model composed of three hierarchical layers (figure

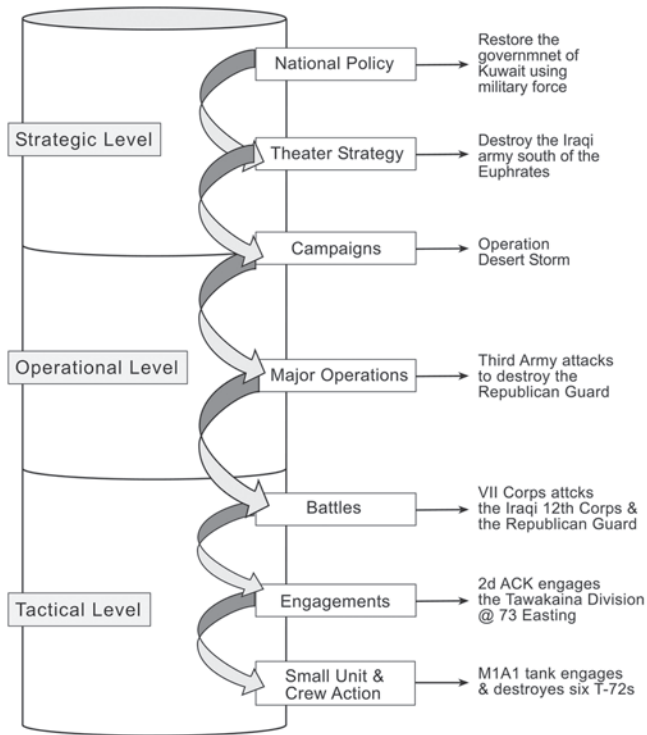


FIGURE 14.2. *Levels of War model adapted from US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0. Authors' redrawing.*

14.2). This arrangement emphasizes the conceptual relationship of the range of activities undertaken by the military, but differentiates actions by their contribution to achieving objectives.

The Strategic Level

“Strategy” refers to prudently developed ideas for using power to achieve communal objectives. In military terms, the highest strategic level is formed when political groups determine objectives and develop plans for employing the power available to them to achieve those objectives. Drawing on those ideas as policy, military leaders develop strategic plans for military actions in general and, with specific adjustments, and to operations in specific times and places. In scale, then, strategy ranges continuously from the lofty goals and intentions to regionally bounded applications of those same objectives.

The Operational Level

Turning strategic policy into specific action is the operational level of war. This is the sphere of conceptual and practical work, where field activities are planned, conducted, and sustained. It is directly relevant to archaeological investigations because activities at this level are bound to specific times and spaces. Many of the terms and concepts developed to address those temporal and regional frames have potential archaeological applications.

The Tactical Level

Tactics are the employment of force in combat and the tactical level of war is the realm of direct, close fighting. This level of war deals with how opposing forces use the resources, information, and locations available to them to defeat or destroy their enemies.

The resources of modern armies are vastly different from those of past military forces, but the issues identified by the Levels of War model are general. Since they are at least implicitly part of all conflict, sensitive assessment of historical, ethnographic, and archaeological sources should bring them into focus. Doing so allows the residues of tactical actions to be viewed in operational and strategic terms.

LEVELS OF WAR AMONG THE CHEYENNE AND ALLIED TRIBES

Warfare and military traditions of Plains Indian culture have been carefully recorded and much discussed (Secoy 1953; Smith 1938, Grinnell 1910, 1956; Mishkin 1940; McGinnis 1990; McDermott 2003) because they were historically and culturally very important. In fact, a Levels of War model is rather easy to develop for Plains tribes and is interesting because it shows that military strategy and operational organization served as basic structural principles for these groups.

Unlike village-based agricultural tribes, the Cheyenne, Lakota, Arapaho, and related societies depended on mobility to hunt buffalo, trade, and make use of other widely distributed resources. Mobility, which was an essential pattern of life for groups like the Cheyenne, gave operation support to security, since communities had the wherewithal to move in directions and to areas that were removed from conflict. Their "home stations" were tent camps that could move and reorganize themselves in various forms and sizes throughout the year. A well-positioned camp would be set up to be secure. Its exposures and resources could be assessed so that threats could be understood. An organized security perimeter would also be a standard feature so a well-established

camp was hardly a precarious target. Still, security had to be a major goal for the Cheyenne and related Plains tribes, and serving as security for wives, families, and communities was a central value for warriors.

Most of the combat involved raids conducted by small groups intent on stealing horses, taking trophies, or revenging a previous affront such as the killing of a friend or kinsman. Even such small engagements could be very costly, not to mention lethal. They would be particularly threatening to mobile hunting groups like the Cheyenne, who spent much of the year in small, isolated units.

In traditional Cheyenne society, military prowess was the primary source of male achievement. Personal valor, energy, and boldness were the basis of social standing so that combat offered men opportunities to demonstrate or gain recognition. For that reason, individual gallantry that could be observed and socially celebrated in the retelling of war-honor events was a major basis for Plains Indian warfare. Trophies such as stolen horses, scalps, or captured weapons offered particularly strong demonstration of valor and ability. They also, of course, carried practical value. Dramatic individual action was, itself, a desirable military goal for Plains Native societies. Valor could be a strategy, but it would be wrong to assume that Plains warfare was foolhardy or careless. Traditionally, raiding parties that lost a member could not return home as victors, even if they had gained honors and booty. Suicidal fighting became a feature of some Plains groups such as a Cheyenne Dog Soldier Society, but it was a late development and a feature of the extremes that developed late in the Indian Wars (figure 14.3).

Beyond the search for individual valor and boldness, Cheyenne social organization provided strong and certain support for military operations. The tribe was identified and unified by language and a core of religious beliefs and practices, but practically residential groups were loosely organized and fluid. The major institutions that bound the tribe together socially were six prominent military societies. As organized groups, these societies were called on to serve a variety of social functions. Since they maintained their own discipline and internal hierarchy, members of military societies could organize activities and enforce either secular or spiritual affairs. Their social assignments meant that societies were quite used to dealing with a range of activities and “operations” in the strict military definition of that term. Raiding, intelligence, scouting, communications, and picket actions were all activities that members of warrior societies were used to undertaking in the normal course of the mobile Plains lifestyle. All of these actions were easily applied in combat situations.

Practically, the societies were groups of men organized for military operations. They recruited energetic, fearless young men from across the tribe

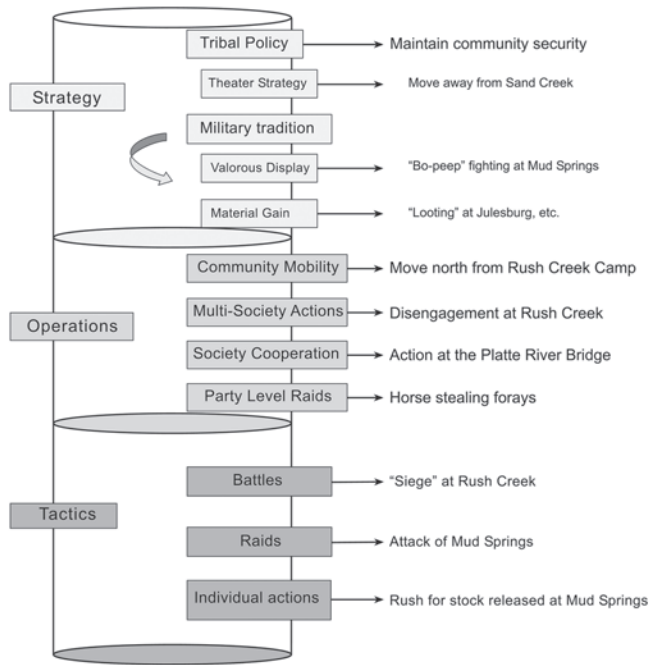


FIGURE 14.3. *Levels of War model presenting strategic goals, operational objectives, and tactics for the Cheyenne in 1865. Authors' original.*

and provided them with operational support. Through mock battles, small raids, other organized actions like target practice and regular recounting of laudable battle exploits, societies trained young warriors. They also placed them in a hierarchy of respect and responsibility through which a man could mature. By providing means for identifying skilled leaders at various levels, societies could organize either very small actions—raids or scouting expeditions—or large military undertakings like frontal attacks or strategic withdrawal. Composed of groups of men who knew one another well and were used to operating together, military societies supported small-group cohesion during raids and tactical engagements. By carefully maintaining residual alliances with other societies, members of military societies could rapidly coalesce into groups that could undertake large cooperative actions. The hierarchy within societies provided an equivalent to the modern military in structure for staff function and disciplined action. Once tribal leaders had

assigned a task, or key society members had accepted a responsibility, societies provided clear means for disseminating information. Individual members could be sanctioned, even seriously disciplined, if they did not follow the orders of established society leaders. This let the community as a whole expect that plans would be carried out. Finally, men's societies provided logistical support for warfare. Society members wore distinctive devices and heraldry that could support tactical activities. They also provided networks within which arms could be shared and rationally distributed among men of different abilities and social standing. Sharing a captured weapon was an important means of establishing a close relationship. In all of these senses, then, Plains tribes had strategic and operations organizations that guided their combat.

Tactically, Plains Indian warriors usually functioned as light cavalry. Virtually all men could ride well and were expert in archery and the use of other close-combat weapons like the lance or club. But demonstration of combat valor did not, however, require lethal force. Touching an enemy could count as a significant achievement. Such tactics favored individual charge and other small-group engagements. By the 1860s, however, firearms were common and familiar to Plains warriors (Secoy 1953:66ff). When they arrived in the North Platte valley, the Cheyenne and their allies were very well armed with both traditional weapons and breech- and muzzle-loading guns. Guns had been obtained through trade (Halaas and Masich 2004:162) and captured in attacks on Julesburg, Colorado, in January 1865 and in raids on civilian and military posts as the Cheyenne moved north from Sand Creek (Grinnell 1956:174ff). Modern firearms made the Plains warriors truly formidable and changed their military tactics. Guns allowed for effective ambushing and long-distance fusillades. They did not prevent the individual engagements of traditional combat, the valiant charges and daring presentations, but they had two other impacts (Secoy 1953:68). First, they encouraged warriors to work most closely with their terrain and the defensive potential it provided. In place of frontal attack in open country, warriors with guns preferred to attack from terrain that allowed safer approaches. Second, where traditional "shock" weapons favored fighting either individually or in small-group formations, warriors with guns found success in larger, scattered formations.

LEVELS OF WAR FOR THE CIVIL WAR FRONTIER ARMY

During the Civil War, the western frontier was a minor arena. Forces assigned to the frontier were guided by ideas that were not well formed. Still,

the strategic, operational, and tactical activities of the Civil War Army can be reconstructed (figure 14.4).

The Army posted units between Omaha and Denver, and Omaha and Washington state, who were there to keep peace and prevent “depredations.” One strategy for dealing with Indian conflict involved establishing, enforcing, or renegotiating treaties with Native groups. The Army supported these negotiations by either offering security to Indian Agents or by having Army officers take part in the discussions.

As a more direct means of preventing conflict with Indian communities, the Army also developed a number of bases on the western frontier during the Civil War. These included existing bases, like Fort Laramie and Fort Kearney, and relatively smaller new posts, like Fort Mitchell, Cottonwood (later Fort McPherson), and Alkali Station (Barnes 2008; Hart 1967). Whatever their origins, during the war, these posts served as “home stations” where troops could be based, horses provisioned, and supplies maintained. They ensured an Army presence on the frontier and were set up to allow military forces to be deployed as needed on short notice. Their distribution was intended to allow forces to arrive quickly at any scene of trouble.

In addition to keeping the peace generally and “preventing depredations,” the Army carried the special charge of ensuring communication across the Plains. Immigration across the Plains continued throughout the war. The eastern foothills of the Rockies were a focus of settlement at this time and there was growing interest in mining in Colorado and Montana. Denver was a rising urban center that needed to be supplied. All of these developments created traffic along the network of trails that formed the “Great Platte River Road.” Mail that was vital to the US national interest also flowed up and down the road. By 1862 telegraph lines, supported by regularly placed relay stations, replaced the Pony Express system. Maintaining this communication net and ensuring the uninterrupted flow of people, supplies, and information was the special responsibility of the frontier Army (McChristian 2009:127–135).

Addressing these strategic goals in the West carried distinctive operational constraints for the frontier Army. The Army was supported by a series of posts that served as home stations. Some of these antedated the war and some survived into the Indian Wars era. Operationally, wartime Army posts had rather narrow goals, since they were less involved in regional administration, training, or logistics than home bases were to become during the postwar period. Major bases such as Fort Laramie did, however, serve as intelligence-gathering centers, since they tended to offer residual points of contact between the Army and Native groups. Indian communities nucleated around major

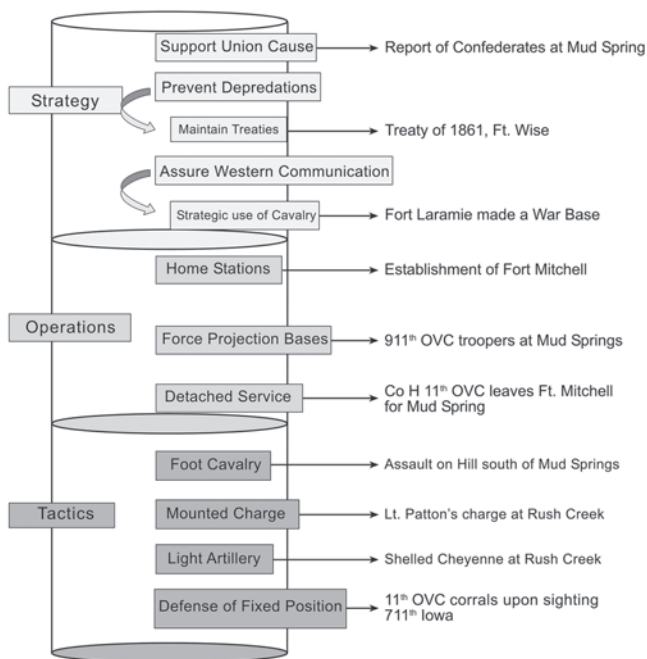


FIGURE 14.4. *A Levels of War model presenting strategic goals, operational objectives, and tactics for the Frontier US Army in 1865. Authors' original.*

bases because they afforded security and access to goods (McChristian 2009). Sensitive archaeological investigation should recognize a distinctive signature for this strategic focus.

In addition to posts that served as home stations, the Army also stationed very small groups of soldiers for very short periods at facilities that required special security. These included telegraph stations where groups of 5–10 soldiers could be stationed either alone or in company with civilians. Such stations functioned as “force projection bases.” Most could be temporary and it appears that none of them was constructed by the Army.

Even with a network of dispersed posts and stations, the huge area served by the frontier Army made mobility a priority. The frontier Army was composed overwhelmingly of cavalry units, essentially all of them formed as volunteer regiments. In theory, a cavalry regiment was composed of 10 companies of up to 80 men each. That organization could afford considerable flexibility. In the east, companies could be amalgamated into squadrons or battalions. Certainly

cavalry officers knew how to organize and manage multicompany groups, but on the broad Plains of the frontier, regimental organization allowed for smaller units to be formed. Few bases housed more than two companies and many small posts were home to a single or even a partial company. Whatever their size, cavalry units were permanently stationed at a base so that their mounts were stabled or held in corrals, fed on forage and grain, and generally well maintained. For that reason, when a crisis occurred up or down the trail, a cavalry unit could respond quickly and with vigor by going on “detached service.” Cavalry men were trained to ride intensively, but as organized units so that they could arrive fit and prepared for action. They were equipped to operate for several days without resupply. Cavalry horses were stressed when they had to survive on wild feed. Thus in addition to provisions and ammunition carried by individual troopers, a unit on detached service had to travel with pack horses or more likely wagons carrying additional food and ammunition and stock forage. With that much capacity, the traveling kit could also include such bivouac equipment as axes, shovels, and ropes that might be needed along the way or at an engagement.

The array of arms carried by Western cavalrymen was diverse, but by 1865 most cavalry units had been equipped with revolvers and breech-loading long arms, including even modern seven-shot Spencers. Cavalry units could also travel with 12-pounder mountain howitzers. These small, brass-barreled weapons could be either drawn by a team or packed on two or three horses. The cannons traveled with an ammunition chest or limber of case shot, shell, and canister rounds. Following the recommendations of the 1861 cavalry manual of Philip Cooke, Western cavalry units traveled in a single rank with each mounted rider or horse occupying at least 20 feet (Cooke 2004; Griffith 1986:42, 1989). In gross terms, then, a moving single company could be about one-fifth of a mile long. Standard procedure also called for a scouting party to ride ahead of the main force and for flankers to be in positions of up to a quarter mile from either side of the column. A cavalry column on detached service was, in other words, a large undertaking.

Tactically, American cavalry units made use of their mobility to move toward engagement, but they usually fought on foot. That is they usually functioned as “mounted infantry” or “foot cavalry” (Griffith 1989:184ff; 1986:42). Mounted charges were part of the Civil War-era cavalry tactical repertoire, but even in eastern campaigns, mounted charges were used very selectively. Instead, once a cavalry detachment arrived at an operational area, they usually dismounted and engaged the enemy on foot. Once on foot, cavalrymen might assault an enemy, firing as they did (Griffith 1986:42). Alternatively, a dismounted

cavalry unit might begin an engagement by establishing a defensive position. This seems to have been an especially common tactic on the frontier where small, outnumbered units patrolled huge areas with incomplete intelligence. Making effective use of artillery required, if not a defensive posture, at least creation of a fixed position. Since bivouac equipment was carried by units on detached service, it would be easy to prepare a defensive position with simple earthworks or other constructions. Whichever tactic a cavalry unit adopted, dismounting meant that one rider in four had to be detailed as a horse holder. Together with wagon crews and others detailed to managing stock, something like a quarter of a cavalry detachment would not be available for combat.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION OF TACTICS, OPERATIONS, AND STRATEGY

The fights at Mud Springs and Rush Creek present different archaeological appearances even though they happened within days of one another and involved the same individuals and groups. The differences between these two battles should not, perhaps, be surprising. As a complex phenomenon, combat can be expected to involve differences. Both Cheyenne warriors and the Civil War cavalymen had diverse military skills and the ability to adjust and innovate. Still, expecting diversity does not explain the observed differences. Viewing the archaeological differences apparent at these battles in terms of the strategic, operational, and tactical issues exposed by the Levels of War model, however, offers a context for assessing the differences of these two battle records. It offers a means of linking the material evidence of battle to higher levels of war.

From the Cheyenne perspectives, Mud Springs presented a positive strategic opportunity. With their home community well provided for and securely ensconced away from threat, Mud Springs could be a fight that offered opportunities for valorous display and attractive booty shown in the archaeological record as artifact distributions (figure 14.5). The warriors' material culture, represented by artifacts found on the ground, indicate that firearms initially favored the Indians, allowing them to fire almost unimpeded into the station buildings with little fear of subsequent return fire. The small body of enemy soldiers was concentrated in one building with a herd of stock nearby. Operationally, then, this battle could be undertaken with minimal coordination by small groups or even individuals. When cavalry reinforcements arrived those strategies and operations became inoperative. The addition of over 200 new guns would have greatly increased the cost of plunder and bravado. Expanding the cavalry perimeters, demonstrated in the archaeological

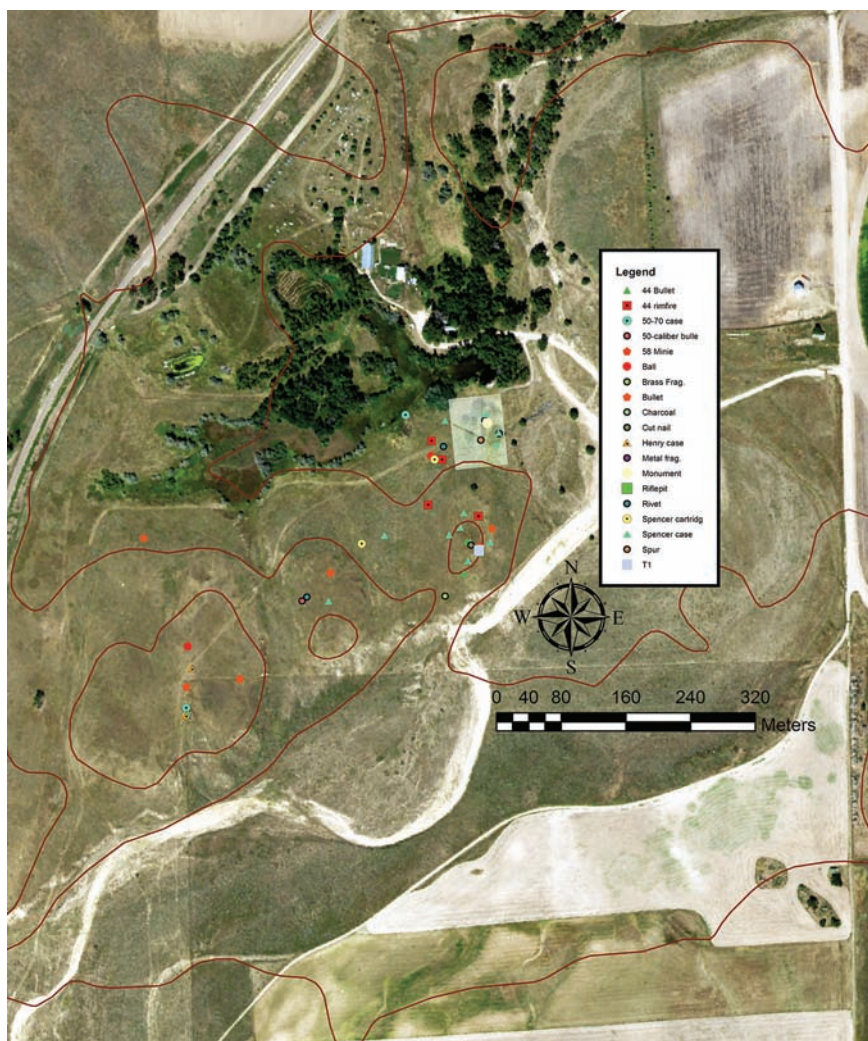


FIGURE 14.5. *Distribution of artifacts found at Mud Springs Station site during the metal detector inventory. Authors' image.*

record by expended cartridge cases found near the station, along the base of the southern hill, and over its top, as well as by posting troopers in the rifle pit above the telegraph station, made attack difficult. More seriously, that apparently minor operational expansion by the cavalry may have exposed the location, or at least the direction, of the Cheyenne camp.

Mud Springs presented a tactical challenge for soldiers at the station, but the battle that opened there conformed to the strategies followed by the frontier Army. The station was an important transportation and communication hub and the mission of the small detachment based there was to protect the transportation network. When fighting started, they spread the necessary information and held their ground until other troops could be detached for their support. As new forces arrived, the tactic of simply holding a defensive position was replaced, but at this time the frontier Army did not have a well-formed offensive strategy for dealing with the Indian forces. In that light it may not be surprising that the major action taken by the newly arrived reinforcements to Mud Springs was a slight expansion of the defensive perimeter. While that was being done, the last of the reinforcements were arriving at Mud Springs—with a cannon!

By February 7, the strategic situation in the North Platte valley had changed for both sides. A large and well-armed cavalry detachment less than 15 miles from their community created a challenge for the Cheyenne. In terms of the Level of War model, it shifted their strategic priority from plunder and valorous action to community security. In that case, the appropriate “operation” was a community movement toward security. That move started February 7, but to move on from the camp at the head of Rush Creek, the Native community had to cross the relatively secure margins of the Platte valley and enter the flat central portion of the valley. This brought them to the route of the Overland trail and into territory that was that was familiar and accessible to the cavalry. They continued on across the frozen Platte to establish a short-term camp in the bluffs on the north side of the river.

The cavalry force that had assembled at Mud Spring left there on February 8 to “me(e)t and repulse . . . and drive off[f] into the Sand Hills north of the North Platte the combined forces of all the hostile bands of Cheyennes, Sioux and other tribes” (Lt. Colonel William O. Collins report, *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, in Hewett 1997:203–233). Moving faster than the Native community, they reached the south side of the Platte where they were discovered by Indian sentinels. The Indian community’s warriors organized to halt the attack by surrounding the soldiers. Archaeological evidence indicates that Indian fighters did not closely engage the cavalry force. Indian forces that had operated in small groups and even individual actions at Mud Springs seem to have been able to organize and maintain a large defensive perimeter at Rush Creek (figure 14.6).

When they were stopped, the cavalry found itself on the Overland trail, terrain that was strategically and operationally very comfortable. Their mountain

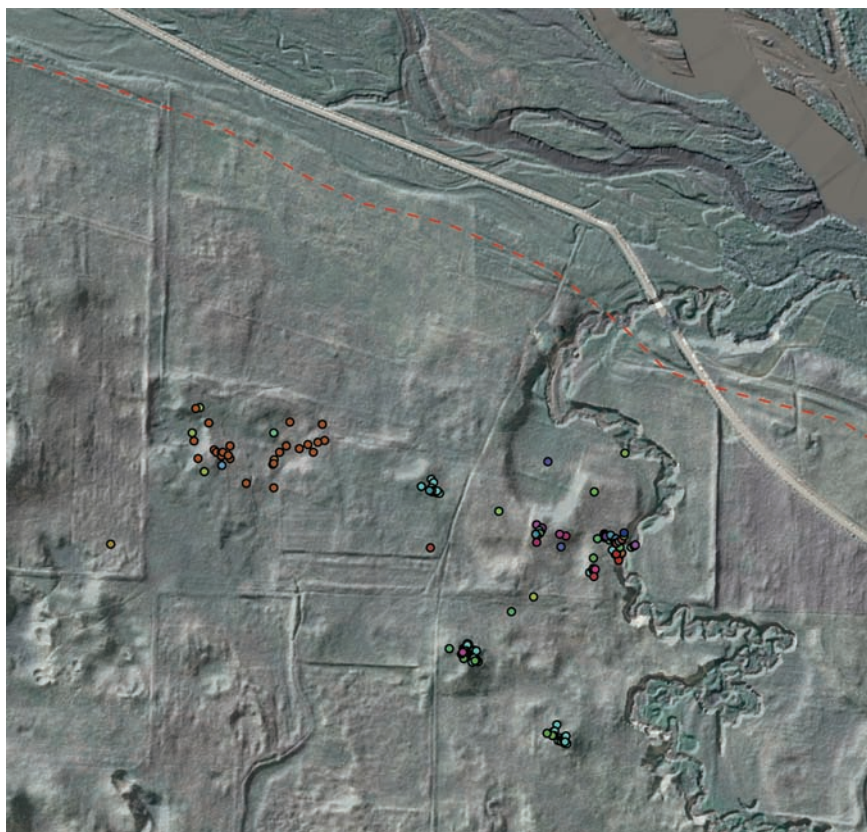


FIGURE 14.6. *The distribution of conflict artifacts from Rush Creek is overlain on a high-resolution LiDAR image. Note how they tend to cluster in association with small hills. Authors' original reconstruction.*

howitzer meant that the soldiers had a somewhat expanded operational capability, but when they were met by Native forces, they reacted as they had at Mud Springs. They formed a defensive position. This strategy was probably ideal for the Indian side. With several wagons the cavalry may have been able to prepare a rather substantial base and keep their adversaries at a distance. Archaeological and historical evidence indicate that the cavalry did move against the Indian attackers. When Indian forces broke off to continue their northward movement, the cavalry did not follow them. The troopers may have halted their pursuit because they were at the limits of their capabilities. It might also be the

case that by seeing the Native community move into the Sand Hills, they had achieved their strategic goal of keeping the Overland trail open.

The forces that met in the North Platte valley in 1865 were certainly ready for war. The two sides were familiar with one another and they carried many of the same arms. The reasons behind their combat, the processes that brought them to their engagements, and the organizations that directed their efforts were all quite different and those organizations are clearly reflected in the archaeological record of the Mud Springs and Rush Creek fights. Strategically, Indian and Army forces were very different, but at this point neither side seems to have aimed at total destruction of the other. Native communities sought security, materials, and war honors, while the mission of the frontier Army was occupation and protection of transportation and communication routes. Combat with neighboring societies was a standard part of life for Native communities of the Plains. Operationally, both sides of the North Platte campaign depended on mobility, but they managed their movements in different ways. Army units operated out of fixed bases, from which units were dispatched to areas of operation. They traveled as units carrying the equipment and supplies they needed to project force and protect themselves. Native communities were themselves mobile, either moving to where resources were available or carrying their supports as they moved. Community security depended on avoiding hostile forces and maintaining a security buffer. Force projection was managed by social units—primarily “military societies”—or small self-selected groups organized by capable leaders who pursued specific tactical objectives. Those objectives might be identified by community leaders for the general good or they might focus on gaining booty or war honors that would increase a meritorious individual’s social standing.

Army units had small cannons they could carry to their engagements, also clearly reflected in the Rush Creek-site archaeological record. Aside from that, by 1865, and especially after the series of small raids that followed the Sand Creek massacre, Indian fighters carried weapons that were comparable to the Army’s arms, again clearly reflected in the Mud Springs archaeological record. Both the Army and Indian fighters were quite capable of organized frontal attacks on opposing forces, but that does not seem to have been the preferred tactic for either side. The archaeological and historic records show that the Army units preferred to begin an engagement by establishing a defensive perimeter from which artillery fire, enfilades, or charges could be organized. An individual warrior or small group of Native fighters might make a bold charge to demonstrate valor or to rush toward valuable property. Bold individual actions could be demonstrated in other ways, such as by creeping close

to an opposing position and making a sudden attack. Groups of society members could join in organized combat, including either defense of a perimeter or a mass charge toward an opposing force.

The Levels of Warfare model presented here was developed from the current US military's operations manual and was tested and refined using the archaeological investigations at Mud Springs and Rush Creek. The model appears to hold significant promise as a middle-range model to test in other archaeological warfare and conflict sites. The model should work well with sites that have historic documentation and well-preserved archaeological evidence of conflict. The model requires rigorous testing in a variety of conflict situations to ascertain its full validity and applicability to a range of site types. The model is eminently suited to the study of historic conflict, and it appears suited for earlier warfare sites, but it requires application and testing to confirm its value to conflict studies.