

HENRY C. KLENCK

Henry Klenck was born in Bremen, Germany. Death and Census records indicate that he was born in 1860, but information he provided for a Billings Pioneers project states he was born in 1857. Whichever it was, his family immigrated to New York City in 1866. He grew up there, and was working as a store clerk when he decided to enlist in the Army.

1876 was a fateful year to join the Army, with western campaigns having the troops chasing after Sitting Bull. Klenck was detailed to Fort Abraham Lincoln near present-day Bismarck,

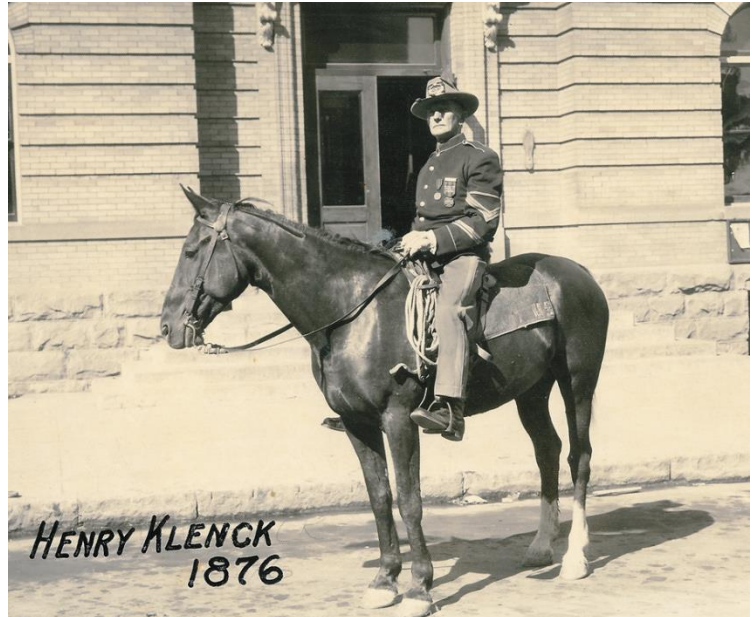
ND, in the 2nd Cavalry under the command of General Terry. His regiment was ordered to the front to support the 7th Cavalry, but arrived a few days after the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Instead of supporting the 7th, they were now ordered to finish the job of burying them.

The regiment returned to Fort Lincoln after a few months, under the command of General Gibbon. He soon went back into the Yellowstone River valley, detailed to guard surveyors and railroad men starting to forge a path for the Northern Pacific Railroad into Montana. They continued thus until 1883, moving between Fort Lincoln and Fort Ellis near Bozeman and the western limits of the railroad crews.

Now attached to General Miles, he was sent to Arizona. There they participated in the campaign against Geronimo. Klenck was seriously injured in one skirmish with a group of Apaches and Comanches when carrying messages to the general. Klenck and his detachment of seven men were badly outnumbered, but had more and better weapons. They won the fight, but Klenck received five wounds, one of which was a bullet that he would carry in his leg for the rest of his life.

After Geronimo's surrender in 1886, Klenck was sent back north to Fort Custer near present day Hardin. After three enlistments and serving in the 2nd, 4th and 1st Cavalries, he was discharged there in 1891, but stayed on at the fort as a civilian postmaster until its abandonment in 1897. He married his wife Carrie in St. Paul in 1891, and brought her back to the fort.

In 1895, he had filed on a homestead in what is now Lockwood. After the fort closed, he removed to his land and took up farming. He had been initiated into the Oddfellows while at Fort Custer, and helped found the Billings chapter. He also was part of the Elks Lodge and the



American Legion. He was also extensively involved in an organization for veterans of the Indian Wars.

Klenck and his wife raised five daughters and one son. Their youngest, Frances, was killed in an accident in 1916 when the horse she was riding skidded on some pavement in downtown Billings. The horse fell on top of the 14-year-old girl, and her skull was badly fractured. In 1918, Klenck was caught in an electrical storm. He was standing by a wheat stack when it was struck by lightning. He was stunned, but otherwise seemed unhurt until he went completely deaf some hours later. He remained deaf for two years, until a Minnesota doctor was able to remove an injury-induced blockage caused by the pressure of the lightning strike.

He also occasionally dabbled in politics, running unsuccessfully for County Commissioner in 1924 and County Assessor in 1928. Klenck was chosen to represent the National Indian War Veterans during the 1928 Decoration Day (Memorial Day) parade. He rode a horse while wearing his military uniform in escort to the parade marshal, resulting in the photograph seen here.

Klenck's health grew poor, and he spent his last years in the "old soldiers' home" near Columbia Falls. He died there in 1935, and was brought home to Billings for burial.

Sources:

- *Billings Gazette*, "Death Claims Indian War Vet", February 17, 1935
- *Billings Gazette*, "Klenck Regains Hearing Lost in Thunder Shower", February 3, 1920
- *Billings Gazette*, "Plans Made for Decoration Day" May 29, 1928
- *Billings Gazette*, "Yellowstone Man Helped Bury Victims of Custer Massacre; Wounded in Apache Campaign", August 3, 1924
- "Biographical Facts of Henry C. Klenck", June 27, 1924, Collection of Billings Public Library