



**P.O. Box 904, Forsyth, MT 59327 406-346-1876 CusterCountry.com Email: Custer@Rangeweb.net
Jim Schaefer, Executive Director**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

82nd Airborne to Make Historic Visit

The renowned U.S. Army 82nd Airborne, stationed at Ft. Bragg, NC, will be appearing at a reenactment of Custer's Last Stand on Sunday, June 28, at 1 o'clock p.m.. Approximately 60 paratroopers will drop out of the sky onto a spot adjacent to the Real Bird reenactment site on the Little Bighorn River east of Garryowen, MT. It will be the largest contingent of U.S. Cavalry personnel on the site since the original Battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25, 1876.

The massive air drop was locally coordinated by Keith Herrin, Master Sergeant, Montana Army National Guard, an instructor for the U.S. Cavalry School, an organization that teaches traditional mounted cavalry skills to those who want to immerse themselves in the history of Custer's Last Stand. John Doran, who owns the U.S. Cavalry School, was also instrumental in making the drop happen. The training this year starts on Saturday, June 20 and concludes with performances in the Real Bird reenactment on June 26, 27 and 28. Classes include the history of the cavalry, equine confirmation and care, horsemanship, drill and ceremony, the culture of the Plains Indians, Cavalry tactics, pistol and carbine shooting skills, and mounted and dismounted saber drills.

The class includes both males and females with horseback-riding skill levels from novice to advanced. Participants will live in tents and cook over campfires so as to get the real "feel" of the life of a 19th century cavalry trooper.

After the last performance, the members of the 82nd and others will travel to Rosebud Battlefield, south of Busby, to get a first-hand look at the site of one of the battles that was a pre-cursor to the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Rosebud Battlefield was recently designated as a National Historic Landmark and the participants in this portion of the training will be able to view an area almost entirely unchanged from when the battle occurred on July 17, 1876, just a week before Lt. Col. Custer and his men rode into infamy. While there, they will discuss the tactics that worked and the ones that didn't.

The 82nd Airborne Division, along with the 101st Airborne Division is actually part of the 18th Airborne Corps, which part of a fighting force 88,000 soldiers and is the Army's largest fighting organization, according to their website, www.bragg.army.mil/history/CorpsHistory.htm.

The unit that will be participating in the air drop is the 1st Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment of the 18th Airborne Corps, commanded by Lt. Colonel Mike Foster. The goal of this exercise, known as a “staff ride,” is to give the modern Cavalry an opportunity to visit and experience a battle site that is almost unchanged from the way it was in 1876. The staff rides are designed to teach lessons of tactics, leadership and military history.

The idea for completing a drop in the area was the result of a meeting at Fort Polk in Louisiana where future training sessions were being discussed. Someone brought up the idea of doing an exercise near the site of Custer’s Last Stand, but there were plenty of logistical problems to overcome.

That’s where Capt. Larry Graham, Fire Support Officer for the squadron, came in. He was assigned the task of arranging a time, place and other necessary plans for the massive undertaking.

“The month of May was first selected, but the more we tried to make that work, the more obvious it became that June 28 would be a better choice. All the pieces of the puzzle came together at that point,” says Capt. Graham. He added that “this is a staff ride on steroids,” given the nature of the event.

Of course, getting everyone to agree to a date was only part of the job. Paratroopers can only do jumps of this sort in designated, surveyed drop zones, and Graham soon discovered that the nearest drop zone to the reenactment site was over 2-1/2 miles away. With the help of Stacey Hammen, an employee of Selby’s, Survey Equipment Company of Billings, Graham and Capt. Ryan Nugent, also a member of the 1-73rd came to the area and mapped out a drop zone that is within a half-mile of the grandstands at the Real Bird Reenactment. Over three days, a drop zone 750 meters (approximately ½ mile) by 2500 meters (1-1/2 miles) was surveyed, mapped and designated as a drop zone that can now be used by other military groups for the next five years, at which time the area would have to be re-surveyed.

“The crew from Selby’s went above and beyond what we asked them to do,” said Capt. Graham.

“It really showed us how helpful Montanans can be,” he noted.

The paratroopers will drop from an altitude of 1500 feet out of two C-130s from the North Carolina Air National Guard. Prior to the drop, the planes will perform a low-level pass over the area.

The staff of the U.S. Cavalry School will place wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Custer Battlefield Museum in Garryowen. The wreath-laying will take place on Thursday, June 25 at 2:00 p.m. and will be officiated by Lt. Col. (Ret.) Bobby Jolley from Olympia, WA. Master Sergeant Herrin will be in charge of the firing party and Flag Detail. The U.S. Post Office at Garryowen has been given permission to lower their flag to half-staff the day of the ceremony, according to Chris Kortlander, Executive Director of the Custer Battlefield Museum.

