

~ HISTORY LESSON ~

# *Shaping America with* **GENERAL GEORGE A. CUSTER**

General Custer's faithful Morgan Dandy was an unfailing member of the company.

By Brenda L. Tippin

One of the most colorful characters of early American history is the famous General, George Custer, best remembered for The Battle of Little Big Horn, in which he and his men met a gruesome fate at the hands of the Sioux and other tribes gathered under Sitting Bull. A strong personality, loved by many, criticized by others, controversy still rages to this day regarding Custer and his last fight. History has often portrayed Custer as an arrogant man whose poor judgment was to blame for this major disaster. Many remember the horse Comanche, a Morgan, as the lone survivor of that battle. Comanche was in fact owned by Captain Myles Keogh of Custer's regiment. It is less known that Custer himself rode several Morgans during the Civil War, and later his favorite horse, a Morgan, was also wounded in another part of his last battle, and survived. Here we will look at another side of Custer, and his faithful Morgan horse, Dandy.

## CUSTER'S EARLY LIFE

A native of New Rumley, Ohio, George Armstrong Custer was born December 5, 1839 to Emmanuel H. Custer, a blacksmith and farmer who had been widowed, and his second wife, Maria Ward, also widowed. Custer was the oldest of three brothers born to this union, Nevin, Thomas, and Boston, and the youngest child was a sister, Margaret. They were plain people and hard-working farmers, instilling in George early on strong principles of right and wrong, honesty, fairness, and a keen sense of responsibility. George was of a gentle nature, always full of fun, and loved practical jokes. He was called "Autie" as a child, and from his earliest life all he ever wanted was to be a soldier. He would accompany his father, who was in the militia, in full uniform made just for him when he was only four years old. His early life, like most such boys, was spent in hard work upon the farm.

Above: Custer at the Civil War battle known as the Woodstock races, horse believed to be Morgan  
(A Complete Life of Gen. George Armstrong Custer).



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Above (left to right): Major General George Armstrong Custer in 1865 (The Library of Congress); General George Custer and wife Libbie, seated, with Lieutenant Colonel Tom Custer, standing in 1865. Tom was brevetted Lieutenant Colonel when he was barely 20 years old (Library of Congress); (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) Captain Tom Custer, commander C Troop, General Custer's younger brother, was killed at Little Big Horn. He was the only soldier to win two Congressional Medals of Honor for personally capturing Confederate flags in two separate incidents (Century Illustrated).

The family's horses are not specifically mentioned, but all the Custers loved horses, and Morgans at that time were the most favored breed among Ohio farmers. The first Morgan brought into Ohio was Morgan Bulrush, known as the Clarke Horse, brought to Orangeville, Ohio, some 96 miles north of New Rumley, in 1846. He was got by Bulrush Morgan, second dam by Justin Morgan, and the popularity of his stock spread quickly through northeastern Ohio. He covered 80 mares the first season, many being brought from a great distance. He was soon followed by Ladd's Morgan Tiger 2d, got by Durrell's Morgan Tiger, a son of Sherman Morgan, dam by Black Prince and second dam by Gifford Morgan brought into Ohio by James Ladd about 1847. Morgan Tiger stood just 16 miles from the Custer farm and was at that time the most popular stallion in eastern Ohio, leaving about 150 foals. Custer, a natural born horseman, was taught like many farm boys, to ride bareback from the time he could barely straddle a horse, and it is likely he knew and loved the Morgan horse from his boyhood.

When George was ten years old, he was sent to Monroe, Michigan to attend the Stebbins Academy, living with an older half-sister, Mrs. Lydia Reed. He stayed there during the school year, returning home to work on his father's farm during the summers until he was 16. It was there one day, not long after his arrival in Michigan, while walking to school, he first noticed a little girl with snapping black eyes and flashing dimples, swinging on the gate in front of her house. As he passed, she called out audaciously, "Hello, you Custer boy!" Then, frightened that she had actually captured his attention, ran in the house. This little girl was Elizabeth Bacon, only daughter of Judge Daniel Bacon, one of the wealthiest and most prominent men in the community. Custer vowed to himself that when he grew up, he would marry this girl, and it was typical

of his character that he would later remember this vow and keep it, though it was no easy task to win Judge Bacon's consent for the hand of his only daughter.

Custer's desire was to go to West Point, and with this in mind, he taught school for a time, studying to prepare himself, and managed to secure his nomination by corresponding, when he was sixteen years old, with the representative from that district, Republican Senator John Bingham, and frankly asking for it, though his own father was well known to be a staunch supporter of the Democrat party.

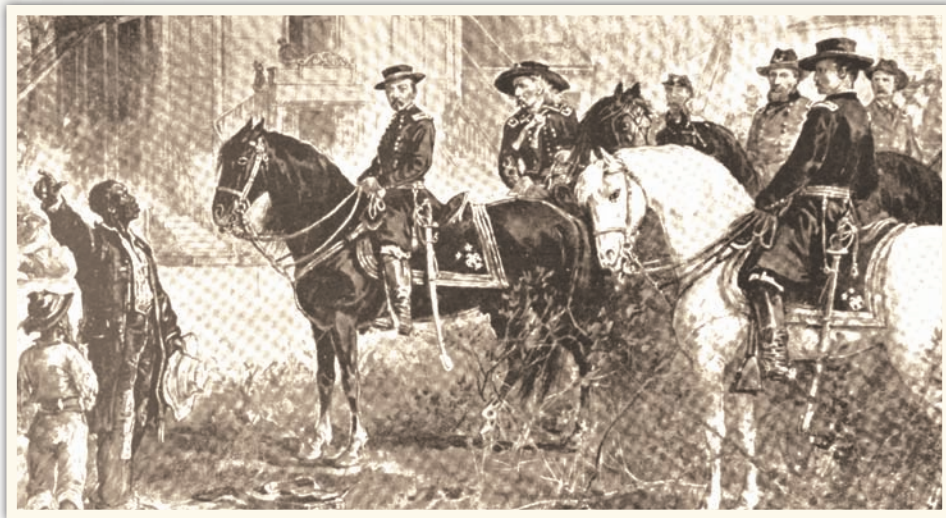
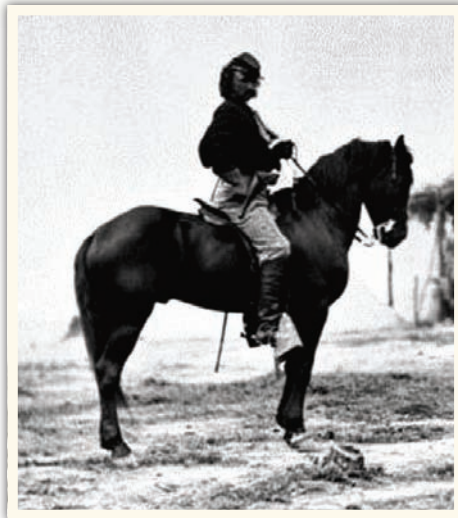
### USTER AND THE CIVIL WAR

Custer graduated a year early in 1861 from West Point due to the outbreak of the Civil War and the need for trained officers, and found himself thrown full in the Civil War, commissioned as 2d Lieutenant in the 2d U.S. Cavalry, just in time for the first Battle of Bull Run. His first mount was a horse called Wellington, believed to be of Morgan blood, which he had known and loved from his West Point days.

The Morgan was much in demand during the Civil War, due to their endurance, weight carrying ability, strong short back, excellent feet and legs, and a calm and cheerful temperament, as well as having an abundance of natural style that appealed to Cavalry officers. They had already long since developed a reputation as cavalry horses. According to the 1876-1877 Report for the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture, when the 1837 Rebellion broke out in Canada, the First Dragoon Guards were sent from England in haste, expecting to find horses for their use on their arrival. This was one of the heaviest regiments in the service, and finding the Canadian horses inferior for their needs they went into



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Above (Left to right): Captain Custer during the Civil War at Falmouth, Virginia. Custer's horse was believed to be a Morgan (Photo © Timothy O'Sullivan, 1863, Library of Congress); General Phil Sheridan and his generals at Five Forks. Sheridan is on his famous Morgan **Rienzi**, who made the ride from Winchester. General Custer, at center, on his horse **Jack Rucker**, believed to be a Morgan (The History of Our Country).

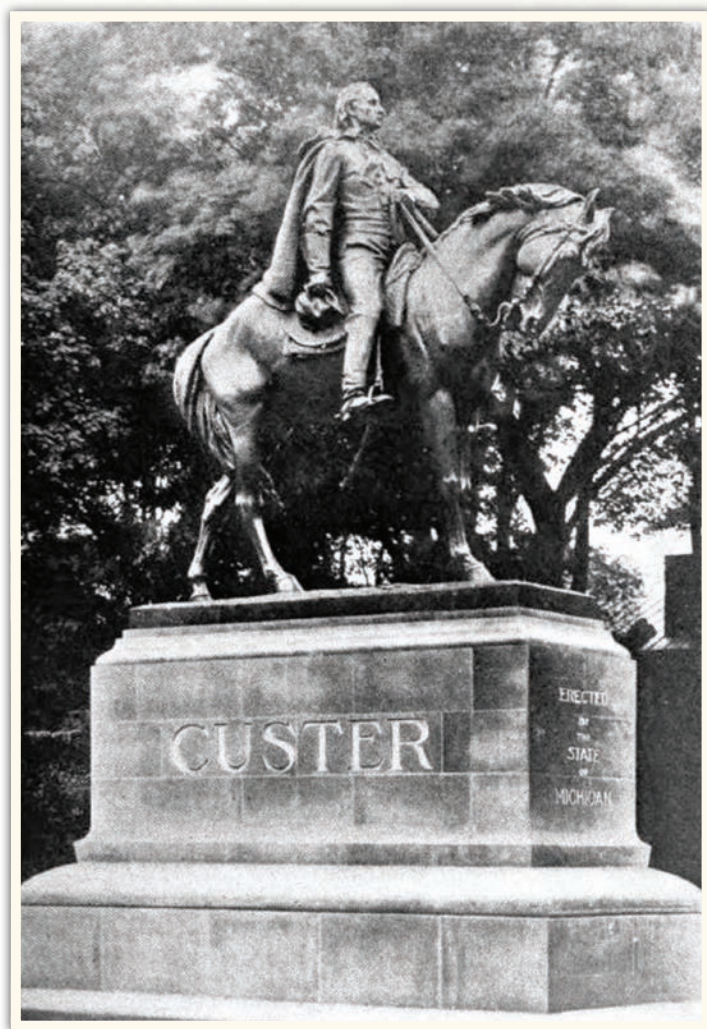
Vermont and purchased carefully selected Morgans. The officers considered these horses equal to the mounts of any of the crack regiments in England, thus it was no surprise that 25 years later Morgans should again be sought for a major role in the greatest war ever fought on American soil. The First Cavalry of Vermont was one of several regiments mounted entirely on Morgans at the start of the war. They were coveted officer's mounts for their fiery style, endurance, and calm dependability in battle.

Custer served as aide-de-camp to General Phil Kearny, and was later assigned to the Fifth U. S. Cavalry through the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 as a topographical engineer. During this time, tethered balloons which would ascend to about 1,000 feet, were used to make observations of the enemy. These were generally operated by a professional aëronaut, but reports proving uncertain due to lack of military knowledge of the operator, it was decided an officer was needed on these excursions. Custer was chosen and ascended almost daily for a time with aëronaut Professor Lowe to gather intelligence. Ordered to wade across the Chickahominy River and spy upon the enemy camp, he was taken to the tent of George B. McClellan, then Commander In Chief of the Union Army, to report. Up to that time, Custer had paid little attention to his appearance, but suddenly conscious of his wet, muddy, and bedraggled uniform in the presence of the great commander, he hung back, embarrassed, but McClellan, wanting to hear his report directly, called him forward. Custer then forgot his clothes and enthusiastically began to tell the General how he thought the picket lines could be captured, and McClellan was so impressed, he asked Custer to join his staff and temporarily promoted him to Captain. Custer then led the attack across the Chickahominy River and seized the first Confederate battle flag of the war. McClellan was relieved of the command in November 1862, and Custer reverted to First Lieutenant, serving on Major General Alfred Pleasanton's staff. During this time Custer formally met Elizabeth "Libbie" Bacon and began to court her and, finally winning the consent of her father, Judge Bacon, they became engaged.

Pleasanton promoted Custer to Brigadier General on June 28, 1863 when he was just 23 years old and placed him in command of one of Pleasanton's cavalry brigades consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry Regiments. By this time, Custer presented a striking appearance. Nearly six feet tall with muscles of steel, piercing blue eyes, golden hair falling over his shoulders, he wore a broad brimmed slouch hat, high top black leather boots pulled over his velveteen trousers; his jacket ornamented with gold braid on the sleeves, and a star showing his rank worked into the broad collar of his soft blue woolen shirt. His scarlet necktie made a splash of color against the blue uniform, and so impressed his men that the entire brigade adopted it. Custer's brigade routed Hampton's Confederate Cavalry at Gettysburg and pursued the retreating Confederate train, destroying more than 400 wagons and capturing more than 1,800 prisoners. He was married to Elizabeth Bacon in February of 1864, and scarcely had they arrived at Washington on their wedding trip when a telegram ordered him back to the front. He led a brilliant attack into Albemarle County, Virginia, known as Custer's Raid, in which he burned a bridge, destroyed a large camp and captured 500 horses and quantities of ammunition among other things. On returning he was attacked by J.E.B Stuart's superior cavalry force but fought back with such fury, he did not lose a single man while killing and wounding many of the enemy and capturing fifty more prisoners.

At this point, Grant was placed in command as Lieutenant General of the Union forces with General Phil Sheridan in charge of the cavalry. Custer and his troops were assigned to the First Division under Sheridan. He fought several cavalry battles in support of Grant's infantry, and in the closing months of the war, was placed in command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> division of the army of the Shenandoah. When Sheridan arrived at Cedar Creek on his Morgan, Rienzi, after his famous ride, he found only Custer's division ready for action. Driving the Confederates in confusion from the field, they captured several hundred prisoners and 45 cannons, resulting in Custer being brevetted Major General





Above: “Sighting the Enemy,” equestrian statue by Edward Clark Potter of General George Custer at Gettysburg. Located in Monroe, Michigan, dedicated by President Taft in 1910, the statue was listed as a Michigan historic site in 1992, and added to the National Register of Historic places in 1994. Since Custer was not killed in this battle, his horse, clearly a Morgan, is depicted with all four feet on the ground.

before he was 26 years of age. Custer was also in command at Appomattox, and received General Lee’s white flag of surrender, ending the war.

According to an account written by the Honorable S.W. Burroughs of Detroit, Michigan in the *Monroe Democrat* of May 1905, “No cavalry officer is recorded in history with a superior record. His record equals that of Sheridan and surpasses that of Marshal Murat of the French armies as cavalry officer under Napoleon.” Custer’s accomplishments during the Civil War were far too numerous to mention. He had eleven horses shot out from under him, several of which were Morgans. An historic equestrian statue of Custer at Gettysburg was placed at Monroe, Michigan in honor of his Civil War service, unveiled and dedicated by President Taft in 1910. Since he was not killed in battle during this war, his horse, clearly a Morgan, is depicted with all four feet on the ground.

### AFTER THE WAR

Following the Civil War which ended with Lee’s surrender on April 9, 1865, Custer was sent with Sheridan to Texas to quell the last Confederate armies holding out, and then to go into Mexico and drive out Maximilian, who had set up a monarchy there backed by French Emperor Napoleon III. It was during this time that Custer, and his brother Lieutenant Colonel Tom Custer—the only soldier to win two Congressional medals of Honor for personally capturing two Confederate flags during the war—who was also a part of his regiment, learned to hunt with hounds, and Custer ever after kept a pack of hounds about him. Finally he was mustered out of service in March 1866, but soon received a commission as Lieutenant Colonel\* of the newly organized Seventh Cavalry in July of that year, and was ordered to Fort Riley, Kansas, in the fall for what was to be the final segment of his life as an Indian fighter. (\* Custer was usually addressed as General Custer due to his war time rank, brevet Major General, brevet meaning a higher temporary rank during war-time—though he was commissioned afterward as Lieutenant Colonel. Likewise Tom Custer had a brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel, but was a Captain in Custer’s regiment.)

Custer’s wife, Libbie, accompanied him on these expeditions, traveling with the regiment hundreds of miles by horseback, and camping with them on the plains wherever possible except when they were directly engaged in a campaign against the hostile tribes. Custer’s duties were to protect the progress of the railroads and the white settlers from renegade depredations, while at the same time upholding the rights of the North American Indians promised by treaty. It was an impossible situation to begin with. The famous Cheyenne Chief, Black Kettle, had developed into a formidable enemy when two years earlier, approaching soldiers under the command of Colonel John Chivington ignored Black Kettle’s flag of truce and brutally attacked his village—despite the fact that just the day before Black Kettle had approached a U. S. Army Fort and had been assured that his village of 800, located at Sand Creek, would be protected as the land had been promised to his people by an 1851 treaty. Following Chivington’s orders to scalp all, big and little, the troops slaughtered at least half the village, mostly women and young children, with mass scalplings and disembowelments. Word spread quickly among the tribes that the whites could not be trusted and must be met with force, and Black Kettle, defending his people, was viewed as a vicious murderer. In addition, the Plains tribes did not look kindly on the white man’s careless slaughter of the buffalo, which the Plains tribes had depended upon for centuries for their very sustenance. The buffalo were being killed in alarming numbers by white hunters for hides and tallow, leaving the carcasses and meat, which could have fed whole villages of the American Indian people, to rot. One hunter was reported to have slaughtered more than 4,000 buffalo by himself in less than a year and a half. These were the conditions Custer faced when ordered to Fort Riley.

### LIFE ON THE PLAINS

It soon became apparent that a great deal of corruption existed among the government contractors and post-traders, endorsed by those higher up who shared in the profits. Packages of rations were found to contain only stones, the bacon was rancid and bread





Above: Custer on Dandy during Yellowstone Expedition (Our Pioneer Horses).

received had sometimes been baked as much as six years earlier and could not be eaten. Needless to say, Custer faced a high rate of desertion due to the miserable quality of such food. In spite of these hardships, he quickly adapted to life on the plains. Although Custer had never been a top scholar in school, it was only because he preferred active outdoor life and saw no reason to apply himself to the many tiresome lessons. When a subject interested him, it was quite a different matter. He learned all he could about the native tribes, their history, and customs, as well as the scientific names and all that had been written in books about the plants and wildlife of the plains. Combined with his own keen powers of observation, he was an adept frontiersman and as knowledgeable as any naturalist.

### DANDY

In the late fall of 1868, the Quartermaster sent 500 horses to replenish the mounts for the Seventh Cavalry as they prepared for a winter campaign. The horses were led past Custer's tent, and his attention was caught by a spirited, compact and muscular horse whose dancing elastic step made him stand out from the others. The horse was a Morgan, about 15 ½ hands, dark bay in color, with a white nose and elongated star, and he reminded Custer at once of many of the best mounts he had ridden during the war. Custer ordered him detained, and on trying him out, decided he would take advantage of the privilege granted to officers, and purchase him from the government for his personal mount.

His wife Libbie wrote, "His fire, promising powers of

endurance, his sound condition, made General Custer think he would prove equal to the terrible marches, the exposure and insufficient forage to which a cavalry horse had to submit. He was given the name of 'Dandy' on the spot because of his spirited manner, and the little proud peacock airs he never forgot except when he slept...Dandy enjoyed a hunt above everything. The General could run down a deer with Vic, and for a spirited, quick dash the thoroughbred was best but Dandy was the old love, and he made such demonstrations of delight over the preparations for the chase that he grew to seem almost human. The leader would extricate himself from the wild tangle of dogs, men, and horses, and Dandy proudly took the advance, curveting, dancing sidewise, tossing his head and mane, evincing by every motion that he was born to lead. When the real work began he fell to the duty of the hour with a skill and determination that made his master, each time he returned from the chase, pat his neck as he leaped to the ground, and say "There never was such another horse created." (Following the Guidon, by Elizabeth Bacon Custer).

The endless plains, though seemingly level, provided many obstacles for the horse in full chase. If Dandy, coming on a buffalo wallow at a dead run, could not veer aside in time, he learned to leap in and out like a cat. The buffalo trails to water were hard deep ruts baked in the sun, with four or more parallel lines. These he would leap with a bound, as well as the occasional prickly cactus beds. Dandy could pick his way through a prairie dog village unguided, rarely sinking or stumbling in these dangerous holes.



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### THE BATTLE OF THE WASHITA

Custer's faith in Dandy was soon to be tested. The regiment was ordered to move out on November 23, 1868 against the remainder of Black Kettle's people who were camped on the Washita River. A snowstorm had set in the night before and when the bugle sounded at 4:00 a.m., the snow was a foot deep and still falling. Trouble had been escalating since the Chivington massacre, with many frontier families being murdered or captured. Still working under General Phillip Sheridan, who had come out for a conference on the matter, Custer had been ordered to find and punish the hostiles as far as his command was able. Yet Sheridan was not a little surprised when Custer declared the weather was ideal for their purpose. Dandy worked his way cheerfully through the deepening snow as Custer guided the course by compass. After marching several days and through the night, they stole upon Black Kettle's village. Custer divided his 800 men into four detachments to surround the village and attack at daylight. The warriors had just returned from a war raid against the whites the night before and were sleeping soundly, so were taken by complete surprise. 103 warriors were killed, Chief Black Kettle among them, while Custer lost two officers and nineteen soldiers.

Custer wrote, "I have yet to make the acquaintance of that officer of the army who, in time of undisturbed peace, desired a war with the Indians. On the contrary, the army is the Indian's best friend, so long as the latter desires to maintain friendship. It is pleasant at all times and always interesting, to have a village of peaceable Indians locate their lodges near our frontier posts or camps. The daily visits of the Indians, from the most venerable chief to the strapped papoose, their rude interchange of civilities, their barterings, races, dances, legends, strange customs, and fantastic ceremonies, all combine to render them far more agreeable as friendly neighbors than as crafty, blood-thirsty enemies." (*My Life On the Plains*, by George Armstrong Custer)

More work was to be done however, and while many of the horses died from exhaustion and scant forage in the bitterly cold conditions, Dandy's nerve carried him through. He learned to paw through the snow to find little tufts of dried grass, and gnaw the bark of cottonwood trees when there was nothing else. For a marching horse, his gait was considered by many to be difficult, as he never would come down to a walk, but continued to curvet and prance, never showing any weariness no matter how long the day. Custer greatly admired this in him, for it seemed not to matter if they had spent the whole day marching through blinding snow, toiling through huge drifts, or scrambling up sheer icy slopes to meet the full blast of a bitter wind sweeping unchecked over hundreds of miles of prairie. None of this would quell his cheerful disposition.

### BUFFALO HUNTING

As the long but successful winter campaign drew to its close, Custer had opportunity to rest and to hunt. Custer felt that hunting buffalo was a wonderful exercise to train his men in riding and fresh meat was always a welcome change from the poor rations. Dandy loved hunting above all else and Custer was very proud of his ability as a buffalo-horse.

Libbie wrote, "One day General Custer, returning from a

hunt, called me to the tent-fly to see his favorite horse Dandy. He was so quick, strong, and intelligent that he was accounted as good a buffalo-horse as there was in the regiment. General Custer said that he was so ambitious that as soon as he saw which animal was singled out for pursuit he bent every nerve to the work. When the game became angry Dandy grew more wary and leaping to the right and left to escape the butting horns, he carried his master so near that the side of the buffalo was almost rubbed in passing. Dandy knew that the only way to bring an animal down was by sending the fatal shot behind the fore-shoulder, so he darted for the side, plunged off at a tangent when the animal wheeled, gathered and sprang for the unguarded quarter...The bridle did not need to be touched, so clever was the horse in getting into favorable position for firing." (*Following the Guidon*, by Elizabeth Bacon Custer).

On this day, when Custer called his wife to come and see the horse, Dandy had chased a buffalo down a steep ravine when the enraged animal suddenly wheeled, lifting both man and horse on his huge horns before they could escape. As Custer felt himself poised in midair, somehow Dandy was able to leap aside and safely carry his rider out of reach of the vicious horns. Custer showed Libbie where one horn had gored a hole in Dandy's side and the other had torn through the thick felt saddlecloth. Yet the narrow escape had no effect on Dandy's nerves, for the very next hunt, he pursued the buffalo with as much enthusiasm and skill as ever.

Private John Burkman, an older veteran of the Civil War, whose ways were slow and methodical, joined the Seventh Cavalry in 1870. Burkman became Custer's personal orderly or "striker", a position very near to being a member of the family, to which he exhibited exceptionally devoted loyalty. He was charged with the especial care of Custer's hounds and horses, and received the nickname "Old Nutriment" as he took prolonged advantage of the doctor's prescription that he needed "nourishing food" to recover from an illness, and was often seen coming from the kitchen with all the food his hands could hold, his jaws working furiously.

Following five years in Kansas, Custer and his men were ordered to Kentucky to help control the Ku Klux Klan, the Carpet Baggers, and destroy illegal distilleries. In January 1872, Custer was ordered by General Sheridan to be Grand Marshall of a sporting party to meet the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, show him the plains, and take him on a buffalo hunt. General Sheridan and General Edward Ord, along with Custer, escorted the Duke to Fort McPherson, Nebraska, where they were to meet "Buffalo Bill" Cody and the rest of the party. The hunt was a great success with Custer giving an exhibition of horsemanship, which the Duke declared was the finest he had ever seen.

### THE DAKOTAS

In March 1873, the whole Seventh Cavalry was ordered to the plains of Dakota, in spite of the Indian Treaty of 1868, which had promised the Sioux inviolable rights to their territory. The government was now chafing as they wanted the Northern Pacific Railroad to go through the middle of the Sioux lands and the Seventh Cavalry was expected to provide protection while the railroad was being built.

They traveled by rail as far as Fort Yankton, South Dakota where the line ended, and then six hundred miles by horseback to Fort Rice, this time with not only Libbie Custer, but several ladies riding at the head of the column. Among them was also Custer's sister, Maggie Calhoun, who had married First Lieutenant James Calhoun of Custer's regiment, later among the slain in that tragic last battle. Upon reaching Fort Rice, the ladies were obliged to turn back as the regiment was then ordered on the first Yellowstone Expedition. The Northern Pacific had appealed to the government for military protection for a surveying party to mark the uncompleted route from the Missouri River in Dakota to the interior of Montana, west of the Yellowstone. The troops consisted altogether of about 1,700 men, including cavalry, infantry, artillery and scouts of the Crow, Osage, and other friendly tribes.

Custer wrote in a letter to Libbie, "Much of our journey was necessarily made on foot, our horses being led in single file, except my own noble 'Dandy.' He seemed to realize the difficulties of the route, and although permitted to run untethered, he followed me as closely and carefully as a well-trained dog. Sometimes we found ourselves on the summit of a high peak to ascend which we had to risk both life and limb and particularly imperil the safety of the horses. Once we came to a steep declivity which neither man nor horse could descend. It was impossible to retrace our steps, as the sides of the peak were so steep our horses could not turn about without great danger of tumbling hundreds of feet. Asking the rest to wait a moment, I looked about and discovered a possible way out to our left, provided a huge rock which lay in the path could be removed. ...Uttering a few words of caution to Dandy, who seemed to comprehend our situation and say, 'All right, don't mind me,' I left him clinging to the soft and yielding soil of the mountain. I succeeded in dislodging the rock after some work, and sent it leaping down the rocky side leading to the valley, sometimes taking hundreds of feet at one plunge. The way being clear, a simple 'Come on, Dandy,' and we took the advance, followed by the rest. We were well repaid for our risk and trouble by the grandeur of the scenery that lay spread out beneath us." (Letter from Custer, Yellowstone River, July 19, 1873, *Boots and Saddles* by Elizabeth Custer).

A tragedy was to come out of the Yellowstone Expedition however. Two civilians accompanied the Seventh Cavalry, Dr. Honzinger, the veterinarian, and Mr. Baliran, the sutler. Both were older men, well-liked among the regiment, and being amateur naturalists and botanists, they liked to explore near the camp although they had been cautioned most carefully about the dangers of hostile tribes in the area. It happened that while the troops had been drawn into a skirmish up on the hillside, the two old gentlemen were watering their horses near the camp, and though unarmed, were attacked and brutally murdered. The troops were understandably angry, longing to punish the perpetrators of this awful deed, but the rest of the expedition closed without incident.

### THE BLACK HILLS EXPEDITION

The Black Hills, lying about 60 to 70 miles north of Fort Laramie, were out of the regular line of travel, and had as yet never really been visited or explored to any degree by white men. The Sioux

considered these lands sacred and were very mysterious about the area, which was also supposed to be exclusively protected by the treaty of 1868. One day, some of the Sioux brought some gold nuggets in to the trading post, and, admitting they came from the Black Hills, word spread like wild fire, and the government began to receive a great deal of pressure from miners wanting to go in there. Thus it was decided the area needed to be surveyed for the presence of minerals, and Custer, with the Seventh Cavalry, was again called upon to lead the expedition. The expedition consisted of ten companies of the Seventh Cavalry, plus two of infantry, along with sixty scouts from friendly plains tribes, over 1,200 in all with a huge wagon train. For all, it seemed a romantic and mysterious adventure as they explored the beautiful country relatively unmolested with Custer on Dandy prancing at the head of the column.

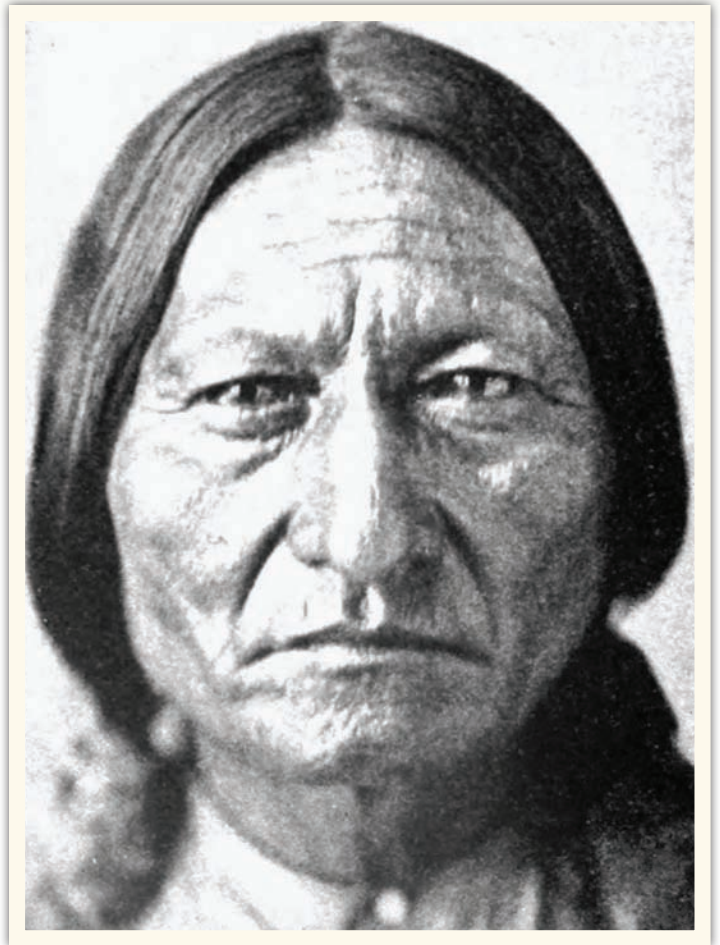
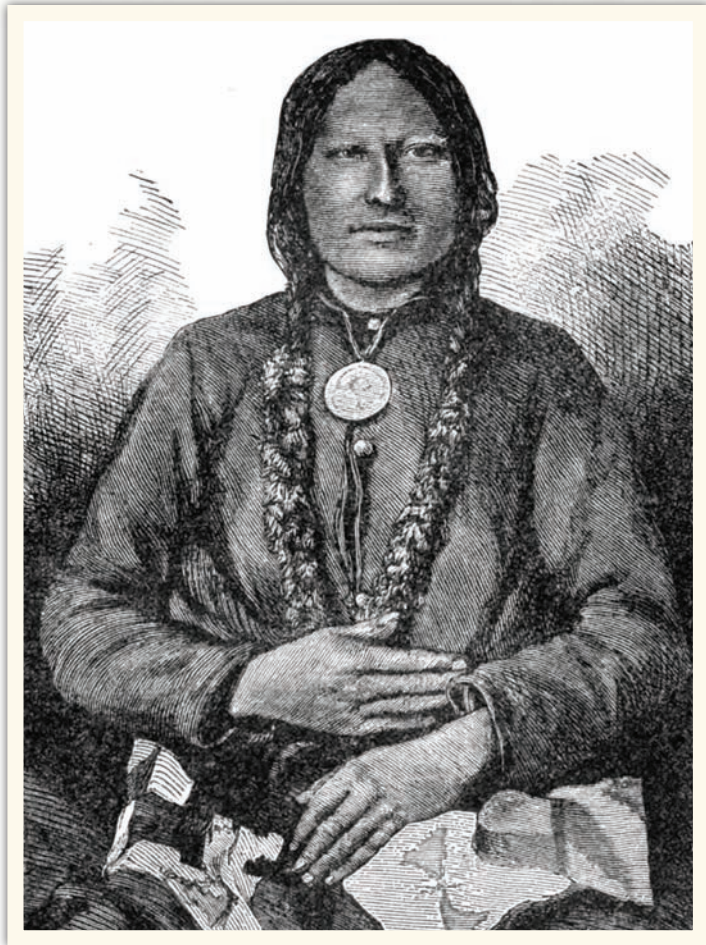
Custer wrote, "In no public or private park have I ever seen such a profuse display of flowers. Every step of our march that day was amidst flowers of the most exquisite colors and perfume. So luxuriant in growth were they that men plucked them without dismounting from the saddle. Some belonged to new or unclassified species. It was a strange sight to glance back at the advancing column of cavalry, and behold the men with beautiful bouquets in their hands, while the head gear of their horses was decorated with wreaths of flowers fit to crown a queen of May. Deeming it a most fitting appellation, I named this Floral Valley." (*A Complete Life of Gen George A Custer*, by Frederick Whittaker).

The botanist, along with the party, estimated there were at least fifty different species of flower in bloom, with at least as many more which had either already bloomed or were yet to bloom, and adding to the total, trees, shrubs and grasses, brought the total to 125 species. Some gold was also discovered, which warranted further exploration and the Native Americans were growing increasingly displeased over the government violation of their treaty and efforts to change it offering less valuable lands.

### RAIN IN THE FACE AND SITTING BULL

In 1875, a year and a half after the murder of Dr. Honzinger and Mr. Baliran, Charley Reynolds, one of the army scouts, brought Custer news of a certain Unkpapa Sioux called Rain In The Face he had heard boasting of these murders during the Sun Dance Ceremony. This practice tests the bravery of the warriors by having them undergo a voluntary torture. Four long gashes are made in the chest to separate the muscles so that a cord is passed through and the warrior is then suspended by these bands of muscle, gazing into the sun until the weight of his body causes the cord to tear through and he drops. Rain In The Face was said to have endured this torture for an exceptionally long period and was thus highly regarded for his bravery. Therefore, his capture was planned, and he was arrested by Tom Custer when he came in to the store. He was kept in the guard house awaiting trial, and General Custer, interviewing him, managed to extract a full confession of how he had murdered the old men. However, before Rain In the Face could be brought to trial, he managed to escape, and vowing revenge—in particular on Tom Custer—went to join the band of hostiles who were gathering under Chief Sitting Bull.





Above (left to right): *Rain In The Face*, who vowed revenge and claimed to have cut out Tom Custer's heart (*Our Pioneer Heroes*); Chief *Sitting Bull* (*Sioux Indian Wars*). The Battle of the Little Big Horn was due to *Sitting Bull* holding out against the government in taking his people to the reservation, as he rightly believed the Indian Treaty of 1868 promising the Black Hills to the Sioux had been violated. The Sioux Nation is still in litigation with the government to regain these lands.

Sitting Bull, a mysterious and powerful chief, considered himself something of a prophet. He was a heavy-set muscular man, about forty-two years of age at the time and exerted great influence over many of the tribes and other chiefs, though not himself a warrior, but a charismatic leader. He had formed a powerful alliance with Chief Crazy Horse of the Cheyenne, and many other tribes. Though he seldom participated in battles himself, he would direct them, showing a keen ability in military tactics. He was also an eloquent speaker, given to visions and prophecies which often came true and in this manner was able to gain a great following. Sitting Bull was reputed, by some accounts, to have endured the torture of the Sun Dance for two days, during which he had a vision and prophesied the destruction of the white men in a great battle. Also due to his craftiness, and the corruption of the government appointed agents for the local tribes, Sitting Bull had been able to gather unprecedented quantities of superior Winchester rifles and ammunition.

### CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT

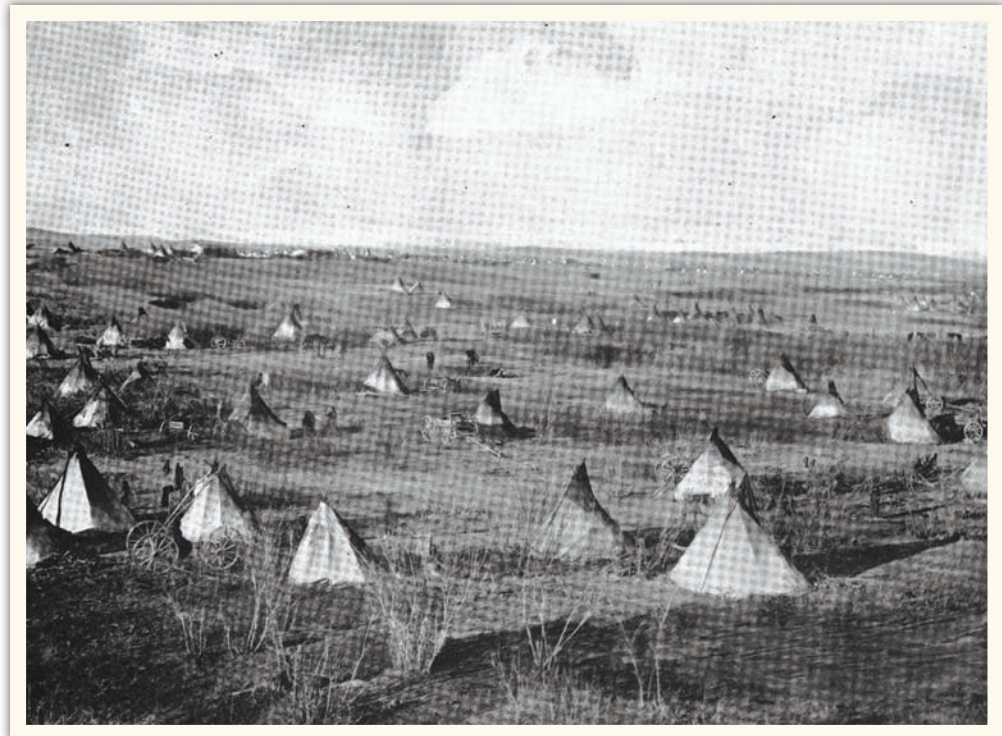
Custer wrote, "An agreement was entered into between the Indians

and the representatives of the government; reservations embracing a large extent of the finest portions of the public lands were fixed upon, to the apparent satisfaction of all concerned, and the promise of the Indians to occupy them and to keep away from the settlements and lines of travel was made without hesitation. This was the beginning of a new era of peace. The lion and the lamb had agreed to lie down together, but the sequel proved that when they got up again, the lamb was missing." (*My Life On the Plains*, by George Armstrong Custer)

In the spring of 1876, a great campaign against Sitting Bull was planned, of which Custer was expected to have charge, and his intent had been to take to the field in April. However, a political matter arose in which William Belknap, Secretary of War under President Grant, resigned, was impeached by the House, and brought to trial by the Senate. In 1870, Belknap had lobbied Congress and was granted sole power to appoint lucrative traderships at the military forts. Soldiers were not allowed to buy supplies except through these authorized traderships, and were forced to pay higher prices. At the same time, they were issued inferior weapons, which were known for jamming so the soldiers had to stop and



## HISTORY LESSON *≈ Shaping America with General George A. Custer*



Above (left to right): *General Custer in his buckskin suit, dressed for his last campaign (Century Illustrated); Sitting Bull's camp before the Custer battle (Our Own Country).*

clear out the cartridges with their knives before they could reload. The local tribes were allowed to buy high quality breech loaders and Winchester repeating rifles, far superior to the weapons of the troops. Belknap was charged with receiving illicit profits from these traderships, and Custer was called to Washington to testify at the hearings. Protesting that what he knew was only hearsay and would not be of value in a trial, and that he was about to depart on an important campaign against Sitting Bull, he did his best to get himself excused, but to no avail. He was detained in Washington for over a month and the only information he was able to offer was that he had received an order of 2,000 bags of grain, which being in bags marked for the North American Indians, he believed had been stolen from them. He had at once reported the matter and refused to accept the grain, but was sent orders that he should go ahead and receive it. He felt bound to relate these facts as he knew them, but his very presence at the trial, however unwilling, served to incur the personal displeasure of President Grant who saw the whole matter as an affront to his administration. Grant refused to see Custer before he left, and kept him sitting outside his office for three days, finally sending down an order that Custer was not to be allowed to lead the expedition as previously planned, but was assigning command to General Terry. Custer appealed, and finally through the influence of General Sheridan was granted permission to accompany the expedition and command his own regiment but General Terry would be in charge, and the whole expedition was delayed till late June, giving Sitting Bull much more time to gather his forces.

The plan was for Custer and the Seventh Cavalry to march up the Rosebud River, following an Indian trail discovered by Major

Reno, Custer's second in command, on a scouting expedition a few days earlier. General Terry's orders gave Custer a great deal of latitude, stating, "It is, of course, impossible to give any definite instructions in regard to this movement, and were it not impossible to do so, the Department Commander places too much confidence in your zeal, energy and ability to wish to impose upon you precise orders which might hamper your action when nearly in contact with the enemy." Custer, dressed in his buckskins, made an impressive picture, mounted on Dandy who, neck arched, pranced in the most elegant manner in time to the music as the band played Garry Owen while he led the column with colors flying in review before General Terry and General Gibbon. Leaning down with a laugh, Custer gave a final handshake to General Terry, and the regiment departed in good spirits at noon on June 22, 1876, with the intent of covering about 30 miles a day. They would wait for Terry and Gibbon to join them with the infantry and remaining forces at the mouth of the Rosebud sometime on the 26<sup>th</sup> before striking. According to Major Reno's report, they made twelve miles on the first afternoon and camped, then thirty-three miles on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and twenty-eight on the 24<sup>th</sup>, then camped, waiting for information from the scouts. Custer called the officers together at 9:25 p.m., informing them the village was in the valley of the Little Big Horn and they would have to cross the divide between the Rosebud and the Little Big Horn, which could not be done without being discovered, so they would move out again at 11 p.m. They marched for another three hours, covering ten more miles, and stopping at 2 a.m. to rest until daylight.

Custer, however, wanting to see things for himself, rested but a short time, and mounted on Dandy, was up before dawn, to ride



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up a steep and difficult trail to meet his Crow scouts at an overlook called the Crow's Nest. Dandy was exceedingly sure-footed and Custer could rely on him to climb up steep places that no other horse would attempt. It must be remembered that this was very near the longest day of the year and dawn came before 5:30 a.m. From Custer's view, the teepees of the village were twelve miles distant. Smoke from the cooking fires of the village mingled with the mist rising from the river in a general haze. The trained eyes of the scouts could make out the herds of ponies grazing, which they told Custer looked like "worms in the grass", but these were difficult to see, and the bend in the river obscured the fact that more villages were encamped farther up the river for miles. The opinion of the government and intelligence related to Custer by Terry was that no more than 500 to 800 hostiles were likely to be ready to meet them. What Custer and his scouts observed seemed to corroborate this, and he estimated at most that they might meet 1,000 to 1,200, which all his past experiences led him to believe his troops could easily handle, as the Plains Indians were well known to prefer flight to pitched battles with armed soldiers. The greatest concern of everyone was that they would escape before they could be intercepted. They were also unaware of General Crook's recent defeat on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June when he had been attacked by the Sioux and the Cheyenne under Crazy Horse, and forced to withdraw after a six-hour battle, while the triumphant warriors went to join Sitting Bull. In fact, nearly 10,000 from the various tribes altogether were camped along the river, with somewhere between 2,500 to 5,000 warriors among them.

Custer had planned to spend the day there, allowing his troops to rest while waiting for Terry and Gibbon, but returning to the camp, received a report that would further alter his strategy. A detail sent to recover a box of supplies which had been dropped on the trail during the night march had found some of the Sioux looting it, and additional members of their war party had been seen observing them from the ridge-top. With this news, Custer felt certain that the tribes encamped with Sitting Bull were definitely aware of their presence and numbers, and would either initiate an attack on his men, or else escape. As the main objective of his mission was to prevent this, he believed the only thing to do was proceed and strike first, a conclusion all his officers were in agreement with at the time.

Accordingly, they proceeded on up the trail, with Custer continuing to lead on the faithful Dandy until about 10:30 a.m. At this point, they were coming nearly straight upon the front of the village. Custer chose here to divide his troops, sending three companies with Major Reno to cross to the left side of the river on which the various tribes were encamped, and attack the village on that end. Captain Benteen, with three more companies, was ordered to go still farther to the left at a 45 degree angle, scouting from the adjacent ridges to ensure there were no additional camps in that direction, in accordance with Terry's wishes, and then return to join the other forces. Custer himself would take five companies, proceeding along the bluffs on the right bank of the river, and then cross to attack from the other end in support of Reno, with the idea of sandwiching the village between them to prevent escape and confuse the warriors with the attack from two directions. Captain McDougal would bring up the rear with the remaining company

in charge of the pack train and extra ammunition, following about 20 minutes behind the others. At this point, Custer ordered Private Burkman to take charge of Dandy, who he had been riding since before dawn, and saddle his thoroughbred, Vic, so as to have a fresh horse for the battle, or what Custer was expecting at that point, to be largely a chase. Burkman was ordered to stay with McDougal and the pack train, and seeing his disappointment, Custer reminded him that he might need Dandy again later, and could perhaps come in at the end when he called for more ammunition.

At first all went according to plan, with Major Reno soon reaching the village and reporting that the Indians began to flee and he drove them before him with ease for two and a half miles. Looking across the river to his right, he saw Custer and his men waving their hats in encouragement before disappearing behind the bluff. Here Custer sent a message by Private Theodore Goldin to Major Reno. Goldin, who had remained with Custer up to that point, recalled overhearing Custer's conversation with Captain Myles Keogh in regard to the scattered confusion resulting from Reno's charge. Custer was said to exclaim, "Keogh! Those Indians are running! If we can only keep them at it, we can afford to sacrifice half of the horses in the command!" Keogh, astride his famous Morgan Comanche, was said to have glanced casually back at the eager troops and responded, "General, we will do all that man and horse can do." (*Indian Fights and Fighters*, by Cyrus Townsend Brady).

With Custer out of sight, Reno began to feel uneasy and seeing increasing numbers of hostile natives about him, began to feel he was being drawn into a trap. Abruptly he halted his men in the timber along the riverbank and ordered them to dismount while he thought what to do. This hesitation was all the warriors needed, and they began to turn on Reno and attack fiercely. Meanwhile, Custer soon reached a viewpoint where the village of the tribes spread beneath him. He still could not see the whole of it, but it must have been apparent that it was much larger than he had anticipated, and here again he paused. This time he ordered his bugler, John Martin, to carry a message to Captain Benteen. (John Martin was Italian, and Custer had chosen another bugler for the day who could speak better English). The hastily scrawled message, the last from Custer, read "Benteen, Come on. Big village. Be quick. Bring packs. P.S. Bring packs", indicating the urgent need for reinforcements and ammunition. Benteen, finding no more camps in the direction he had gone, had already caught up with the pack train and they were all paused watering the horses when Martin arrived with this message. At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Custer had sent a similar message by Sergeant Kanipe to Captain McDougal, ordering him to hurry up the pack train and bring the extra ammunition. From the stories of these men, it seemed the battle had already begun and the air was filled with the whoops and yells of approaching warriors as they made haste to carry these messages.

Goldin, meanwhile, found his way to Reno while these men were dismounted in the timber. Reno read the message and, saying nothing, stuffed it in his pocket, never mentioning to anyone later what it said. In the increasing confusion, he ordered his men to mount again, then dismount and repeated mounting and dismounting three times before finally deciding they were being





*Above: Custer and his troops during their last charge at Little Big Horn, as depicted by Chief Red Horse, who participated in the battle. General Custer, recognizable in this drawing, appears to be at the top right, riding this thoroughbred, Vic, a sorrel with faithfully depicted three white feet. Captain Myles Keogh, on his Morgan, Comanche, appears to be at the bottom right. Comanche, who was described as a buckskin was apparently a light shade of red, with dark red name and tail. Notice how, even in Red Horse's drawing, he appeared to recognize this horse was different from the others, both in his color and way of going, and looks like a Morgan (My Life and Experience Among Our Hostile Indians).*

surrounded and ought take up a position on the bluffs across the river. Though he had lost only one man up to this point and many of the men later said they believed the position in the cover of the timber could have been held indefinitely, twenty-nine more were lost with the retreat to the bluffs. The Native Americans had cut off the more favorable crossing and they were forced to ascend a steep bluff which under normal circumstance neither man nor horse could have accomplished, save for the sheer desperation of the moment. When they had gained this point, Reno's men also realized their access to the river had been cut off and there was no safe way to obtain water.

Benteen and McDougal had hurried forward in response to Custer's messages, but soon encountered Reno and his men on the bluffs and were urged to come to their assistance. In the confusion, no one seemed certain what had become of Custer, though heavy firing could be heard down the river for some time, and several kept suggesting to Reno that now they were all together they ought to go to his assistance. Reno kept delaying as he felt sure they were being drawn into a trap. Finally, Custer was heard to fire two successive volleys in quick succession, which several interpreted as a distress call, intended to alert his men of his location and tell them to come on. At that point some of the troops tried to start in his direction. Burkman recalled that so many of the horses had been killed or stampeded that another soldier had taken Dandy, and he saw that in the ensuing fight to try and get through the lines of shrieking warriors to reach Custer, Dandy—who could never brook any

horse in front of him, and was leading the charge—was shot in the neck and fell. A tide of painted warriors was now coming from Custer's direction and the firing seemed to have ceased. They could not get through, and concluded Custer had gone on to join Terry.

Curly, one of the trusted Crow scouts who survived the battle, claimed he had, by disguising himself as one of the Sioux, managed to make his way to Custer while the battle was still going on and implored Custer to let him try to guide him out. Custer had paused to listen to Curly, dropping his chin to his chest in a characteristic manner he had, and realizing he was being asked to desert his men and try to save himself, refused, instead instructing Curly to try to get out himself and go to General Terry and tell him their fate. Curly claimed to have hidden and watched the remainder of the battle before departing on this mission. His account, as well as that of Sitting Bull and several others who participated in the battle, indicates that Custer was the last or nearly the last to fall, having around him about thirty remaining men who had fought to the end. These included his brother, Tom Custer, another younger brother and civilian Boston Custer who was forage master, a teenage nephew and civilian Autie Reed, son of his older half-sister with whom Custer had lived while attending school, who had begged to go along with his uncle. Their ammunition by that time was apparently gone and Custer had fought valiantly with his sabre, killing several more warriors before one rode close and finished him with two shots, one to the breast and one to the temple. Custer had cut his hair before the battle, and dressed in buckskins and wearing



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no rank, his enemies had trouble recognizing him. However, his was the only body not scalped nor mutilated, which they said was out of respect for his bravery. Rain In The Face later claimed to have recognized and murdered Tom Custer, and remembering his vow of revenge, cut out his heart. A warrior named Little Crow who had participated in the battle claimed that Captain Keogh had ordered his troops to dismount and shoot their horses for a barricade, but was shot before he could kill his beloved Comanche. Little Crow explained that the reason Comanche was not captured nor stolen was because Keogh was still holding the reins when he died and no Indian would take that horse as long as a dead man held the reins. Faithful Comanche, described as a dun or “claybank sorrel” color, was a veteran of many Indian wars, previously wounded on several occasions. He patiently stood guard over his master’s body for some time despite the heavy rain of bullets flying around him, and sustained seven bullet wounds. He had eventually wandered off and become very weak from loss of blood before he was found and rescued when the battlefield, speaking volumes by its silence, was finally discovered by Terry’s men. Afterward he was ordered never to be ridden again and was the special pet of the regiment until his death years later.

The besieged troops remained on Reno Hill standing off further intermittent attacks and only able to obtain water at great risk until the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> when General Terry arrived. Curly had reached him with the dire news, and although his story was initially not believed, his account of the terrible battle was soon proven all too true. Burkman had somehow managed to check on Dandy, and finding the horse still alive, smuggled water to him. His greatest dread seemed to be the idea of having to tell Custer that his horse was going to die.

### DANDY AND FATHER CUSTER

Dandy, however, recovered and was taken back to Libbie, who in turn gave him to Custer’s father.

Somehow, Dandy knew he had lost his beloved master, but recognized something familiar in the old man that was as much perhaps a comfort to him as it was for the old man to have his son’s horse and that last living connection with the three sons he had lost. Emmanuel Custer was then over 70 years old and Libbie was somewhat worried, for Dandy had always required an expert rider. The old gentleman assured her there was nothing vicious about the horse and, though bent and stooped in walking, sat straight and splendid in the saddle. Dandy promptly suited himself to the needs of his elderly master and became a steady going family horse, although he never forgot his part when they were frequently invited to lead parades. They received an invitation to be the guests of Michigan at the State Fair, inscribed “For Father Custer and His Horse Dandy”, and led the procession with Dandy prancing and curvetting with all his old fire, seeming proud that everyone should know he was General Custer’s horse.

Even when the horse was 26 years old and the old man past 80, they would often drive 30 miles to the home of one of General Custer’s staff for a visit, returning by a longer forty-mile route. Dandy would stand patiently beside the street to allow his white headed owner to carry on hot-political discussions. But one morning no whinny greeted the old gentleman when he went to

the stable. Every remedy was tried and two veterinarians were called, but nothing more could be done. Standing bravely until the last, Dandy finally slipped away. He was buried beneath the apple tree where every year a shower of blossoms would cover his grave and old Emmanuel, at 83, bowed his head lower that day, remembering the three sons he had lost and the cheerful Morgan who had brought him comfort for 13 long years.

### AFTER LITTLE BIG HORN—THE REST OF THE STORY

- **Elizabeth “Libbie” Bacon Custer**, wife of General Custer, was 34 years old when he died. She never remarried, but devoted the rest of her life to preserving her husband’s legacy and clearing his name from unjust blame for the disaster, through her popular books and lectures. She died in 1933 at 91 years of age.
- **Maria Ward Custer**, mother of General Custer, never recovered from the tragedy of this battle in which she lost three sons, a son-in-law, and a grandson. She died in 1882 at 75 years of age.
- **Emmanuel Custer**, father of General Custer, derived great comfort from the companionship of Dandy, a Morgan, who was his son’s favorite horse and had been wounded in the battle. He lived three more years after the horse was gone, dying in 1892 at the age of 86.
- **Nevin Custer**, General Custer’s only brother who was not in the battle, had tried to enlist during the Civil War, but he lacked the strong constitution of his brothers and was not allowed to stay in the service. He spent the rest of his life quietly farming in Monroe, Michigan. He had seven children.
- **Thomas Ward Custer** lived and died literally in the shadow of his older brother. He was just 16 years of age when he joined the Civil War, having won the brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel by the time the war ended, although he was barely 20 years old. He was the only soldier to have won two Congressional Medals of Honor, for separate incidents in which he personally captured Confederate flags. In one of these incidents he was shot in the face but carried the flag to his brother, who ordered him to report to the surgeon. Tom was determined to go back to the fight and Custer had to arrest him to see that he got proper medical attention. He arrested the Sioux warrior Rain In The Face for the murder of two elderly civilian men during the Yellowstone expedition. Rain In The Face vowed revenge, later claiming that he had killed Tom Custer during the battle and cut out his heart. Tom fell a little ways down the hill from his brother, and his body was more mutilated than others, indicating Rain In The Face’s story was probably true.
- **Boston Custer**, General Custer’s youngest brother, also had been unable to join the military due to poor health, but joined Custer’s regiment as a civilian forage master, hoping the pure air of the plains would benefit him. Nevertheless he had the same fighting spirit as all the Custers and fought alongside his brother till the last.
- **Margaret Custer Calhoun Maugham**, General Custer’s little sister, who was married to Lieutenant James Calhoun, that day lost her husband, her three older brothers, and her nephew.



She did not remarry until 1904 when she was 52 years of age, and never had children. She died in 1910 at the age of 58.

- **Harry Armstrong “Autie” Reed**, General Custer’s nephew was assigned to the pack train as a civilian herder of the cattle that fed the troops. However, he was determined to go along when he heard they were going to attack, and fought alongside his uncles. He was barely 18.
- **Major Marcus Reno** had served with distinction during the Civil War, earning a brevet rank of Brigadier General. He was commissioned as a Major in the Seventh Cavalry in 1868. While in the field in Montana in 1874, his wife died, and he fell into depression. According to the official report of Captain Godfrey, Reno, unknown to General Custer, carried a flask of whiskey into battle with him, and Reno later admitted this influence was partly responsible for his actions that day. He was later dishonorably discharged from the army for public drunkenness and conduct unbecoming of an officer. He died in 1889 of cancer of the tongue at age 54. In 1967, a military review board restored his discharge status to honorable at the request of his great-nephew, and his remains were reinterred with honors at the Custer National Cemetery.
- **Captain Frederick Benteen** had attained a brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel during the Civil War, and commissioned as a Captain in the Seventh Cavalry in 1866. Benteen assumed command in defending against the further Indian attacks when the troops finally attempted to go to Custer’s aid and were driven back. In 1887 he was suspended for drunk and disorderly conduct and faced dismissal from the Army, but President Grover Cleveland reduced his sentence to a one-year suspension. However, Benteen retired in 1888, professing heart disease, and died ten years later in 1898 at the age of 64.
- **Captain Myles Keogh** was an Irishman who had fought in the Civil War and attained a brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He was commissioned as a Captain in the Seventh Cavalry in 1866. The senior Captain of Custer’s five troops, Keogh had made a last stand of his own, surrounded by his men, and was supposed to have died still clutching the reins of his beloved Morgan, Comanche. His body, though stripped, was said to not be mutilated either, which some attributed to the religious Agnus Dei medal he wore around his neck.
- **Comanche** was a Morgan horse, purchased by the army in Kansas in 1868—possibly from the same group as Dandy—and Myles Keogh used his officer’s privilege to buy the horse from the government. He was named Comanche for being wounded by a Comanche arrow in one of his first battles. Keogh’s horse was said to have stood guard over his master’s body through the battle, not attempting to free himself from Keogh’s death grip on the reins until after it was over and the warriors had stopped looting the fields. Their superstition regarding a dead man holding the reins apparently prevented his being stolen, and his presence may also have helped to protect his master. One of his seven bullet wounds corresponded to Keogh’s shattered knee. He was rescued and nursed back to health after the battle and made a special pet of the regiment and was in fact promoted to Second

Commanding Officer of the Seventh Cavalry. After Custer’s death, Colonel Samuel Sturgis (brevet Major General, who had been Custer’s immediate superior officer in the chain of command) himself assumed command of the Seventh, and Comanche was his Second In Command and although it was of course an honorary title, the horse outranked Major Marcus Reno. He died in 1890 at somewhere between 27-30 years of age, and was afterward stuffed and put on display at the University of Kansas Natural History Museum where he may still be seen.

- **Private John Burkman** had served as a private during the Civil War, and joined the Seventh Cavalry in 1870, where he was appointed General Custer’s orderly. Burkman was especially loyal to the Custer family and never got over not being at the General’s side during the final battle. He retired due to disability in 1879 and spent most of the rest of his life in Billings, Montana, finally dying of self-inflicted gunshot wounds in 1925 at the age of 86.
- **Vic**, the sorrel thoroughbred Custer rode during the last battle was said by some accounts to have been killed, while a Santee Indian named Walks-Under-The-Ground claimed to have captured him. Many accounts mistakenly describe Vic as having four white feet. He had three.
- **Dandy**, the plucky Morgan who was wounded leading the charge of men trying to get back to Custer from Reno hill, recovered and was given to Custer’s father where he lived happily for 13 more years. He died in 1889 at the age of 26.
- **Chief Sitting Bull**, an Unkpapa Sioux and self-proclaimed prophet, he had predicted the destruction of the white troops in a big battle during a vision a few days prior while undergoing the Sun Dance torture. His account and that of other warriors participating all agree, Custer’s reputation was so great they had ordered the women and children to pack up and were preparing to flee, only countermanding that order when Reno retreated. After the battle, Sitting Bull and many of his people retreated to Canada and remained there several years before finally surrendering to the U. S. Army in 1881. By this time, his following had much deteriorated, and hunger and desperation forced his return with 186 remaining followers. In 1885, he toured with Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West show, earning \$50 per week. Here he met Annie Oakley and was so impressed with her shooting ability he adopted her as a daughter. In 1891, the Indian Agent, fearing Sitting Bull was going to flee the reservation and join the Ghost Dancers, asked the military to arrest him. Sitting Bull objected to the arrest, force was used, and due to his people trying to defend him, a fight broke out in which the officers shot and killed Sitting Bull. He was about 59 years old.
- **Chief Gall**, an Unkpapa Sioux who was one of the principal commanders participating in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, was largely responsible for figuring out Custer’s strategy and silently surrounding the five troops under his command, resulting in their annihilation. His wife and children had been killed during Reno’s attack at the other end of the village so he was not in a good mood. After the battle, Gall had gone to



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## HISTORY LESSON ~ General George A. Custer

Canada with Sitting Bull, but came to disagree with him and surrendered in 1880. He became a Christian convert and remained living at the Standing Rock Agency until his death in 1894 at the age of 54.

- **Curley**, Custer's Crow scout was the first to bring news of Custer's defeat to General Terry, and claimed to have watched the battle from a distance and was the last to speak to Custer. Both Curley's and Sitting Bull's account agree that the battle

lasted "through most of the going forward of the sun". Curley stated that as long as their ammunition held out they were able to put up a fierce resistance, and continued in hand-to-hand combat for some time after the ammunition was gone. The warriors were no match for Custer in hand-to-hand combat, but seeing their ammunition was gone, they made a final charge, shooting the remaining soldiers. Curley died in 1923 at the age of 67. ■

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