

"Glory Hunter"



Gen. Geo. A. Custer

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

HIM it is written: "He followed Glory all his days. He was her lifelong devotee. She gave him favor withheld from most men, and denied herself when his need of her was sorest. When, desperately pursuing, he died on the heights above the Little Big Horn, Glory, the perverse, relented and gave eternal brilliance to his name."



So begins chapter one of a new "now-it-can-be-told" biography—Frederic F. Van De Water's "Glory Hunter," published recently by the Bobbs-Merrill company. The "Glory Hunter" was George Armstrong Custer, Lieutenant-Colonel, 7th United States Cavalry, Brevet Major-General, United States Army, the "Boy General with the Golden Locks," the "Murat of the American Army," the good sword, the hero, the martyr.

Around his name has raged endless controversy, for he was the kind of man who seems to have been capable of inspiring either the bitterest hatred or the blindest loyalty. Chief among the exemplars of the latter was, of course, his wife, "who was to devote the rest of her life to adornment of her husband's memory." Long before his tragic death in 1876 there were those who had reason to hate him but chose to hold their tongues. After that event there were whisperers of suspicion but little, if any, full-voiced denunciation.

Elizabeth Bacon's fifty-odd years of glorification have enshrined her husband in the folk-lore of America. She proclaimed him hero and, since she was his widow, men who thought otherwise held their peace. Last spring she died, as did Gen. E. S. Godfrey, another staunch defender of Custer's name. Therefore a "now-it-can-be-told" biography can appear without giving pain to these two honored devotees to a partly true legend.

If, indeed, as the poet tells us, the child is father to the man, then several incidents in the childhood of the boy who was born in New Rumley, Harrison county, Ohio, just 95 years ago (December 5, 1839) are significant of the man he was to become. When war with Mexico threatened, his father, Emanuel Custer, joined the "New Rumley Invincibles," a militia company, and provided his little son, "Autie," with a miniature replica of his uniform. One day the youngster amazed his father by lifting his arm in imitation of an older half-brother who had been "speaking a piece" at school and declaiming in his boyish treble "My voice is for war!" For the next 30 years "Autie" Custer's voice was to be raised for war—to be heard in a "wild shrill whooping in the forefront of a hundred cavalry charges."

The Custers were staunch Jacksonian Democrats even though their community was predominantly Whig. One day Emanuel Custer took his four-year-old son to the doctor to have a tooth pulled. As they left the office, the boy gave a bloody grin and, apropos of nothing, exclaimed: "Father, you and me can lick all the Whigs in Ohio." In 1876 he felt the same way about the Sioux in Montana and he died because of that belief.

When he was four years old a new brother arrived in the Custer home—Nevin J., who is worthy of mention if for no other reason than that he was so different from the rest. He lived and died in peace, a farmer. Thomas W. Custer appeared on the scene in 1845, Boston Custer in 1848 and Margaret Emma Custer in 1852. They, especially Tom Custer, became the first heroworshippers to send their older brother on his pursuit of glory and they were to share in the tragic end of his quest, as was his half-sister, Lydia, who in 1849 married David Reed of Monroe, Mich. When she went to the little pioneer town on the shores of Lake Michigan, she took "Autie" with her. He lived there off and on for the next six or seven years and there he met the girl, Elizabeth Bacon, whom he was to marry 10 years later.

Returning to New Rumley again, Custer took the first step in his glory-seeking career. Despite his father's strong Democratic principles and consequent disapproval of his son's actions, Custer was not averse to asking a Republican congressman to get him an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Unsuccessful at first, Custer was so importunate that finally John A. Bingham, the congressman, gave it to him and on June 3, 1857, he entered West Point. There he was "a defiant insubordinate cadet, forever in trouble and as constantly on the verge of more. . . . The impartial voice of the Academy records portrays George Armstrong Custer as a slovenly soldier and a deplorable student." The approaching crisis of the Civil war resulted in the academy's five-year course being compressed into four and two classes were graduated in 1861—one in April and another in June. Custer was in the latter group, his standing being thirty-fourth in a class of thirty-four.

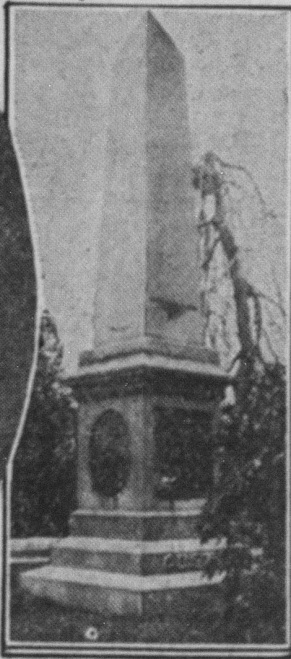
"Two years of campaigning would turn West Point's indifferent sloven into a soldier," writes Van De Water. "It would not change his substance. Battle that reconstructed others, sobering and deepening their spirits, would only sharpen George Armstrong Custer. He would become a keen weapon, terrible to the enemy, difficult for a weak superior to wield, yet intrinsically he would remain the raucous and reckless youngster who had defied his parents to clasp the hand of



Where the Custers Died
Photo by Greaves Kilbourn



Gen. and Mrs. Custer



Custer Monument at West Point

a political foe and had been the Academy's chronic insurgent. His nature was bright and volatile, yet durable past the power even of war to alter."

It was during these two years that the tradition of "Custer's luck" began. For nothing else but luck could have made him a brigadier-general at the age of twenty-three, the youngest in the army. . . . At least, the historians have never been able to find any good reason why in 1862 he should have been advanced from a first lieutenant in the Fifth cavalry to the command of the Second brigade of the Third division, rocketing past the ranks of captain, major, lieutenant-colonel and colonel. True, he distinguished himself in a wild charge at Gettysburg but at least twice thereafter he narrowly escaped annihilation at the hands of that cavalry genius in gray, Jeb Stuart.

The appointment of Phil Sheridan as chief of the Union cavalry gave Custer his chance for fame. "It was Sheridan who overlooked insubordinations by Custer with unwonted charity. . . . Here was no strategist but a tireless body and a mind as hungry for war as a bent bow. Custer was a weapon that Sheridan knew how to use." He used him in the raids which devastated the Shenandoah valley where Custer seems to have learned willingly enough the lessons of ruthlessness so necessary to those who engage in the dirty business of making war.

By the spring of 1863 he had become a major-general and it was "Custer's luck" again which enabled him to be "in at the death." For it was Custer and his cavalry who swooped down upon Appomattox Station and slammed shut the door to Lee's only avenue of retreat. After Lee's surrender, Custer issued the oft-quoted congratulatory general order to his Third division, whose record, he declared, was "unparalleled in the annals of war."

"This is more ornate but scarcely more accurate than other battlefield proclamations," says his biographer, whose calm analysis of the record shows that it was much less remarkable than the hero-worshippers would have us believe. While admitting that Custer was a "fair tactician and a smart disciplinarian. . . . and as physically valiant a man as ever drew sword," a summing up of the evidence leads inevitably to the conclusion that George Armstrong Custer had few, if any, of the qualities which make a really great commander and it is doubtful if he can be set down as an outstanding cavalry leader in the same class with Stuart and Forrest of the Confederate army or Sheridan, Merritt and Torbert of the Union army.

His weaknesses as a commander became even more apparent in his Indian fighting days than in his Civil war career. When he became lieutenant-colonel of the newly organized Seventh cavalry and busied himself with molding that outfit into what he believed a cavalry regiment should be, the strict discipline which he enforced and his callous disregard for the welfare of his men brought him close to disaster. In September, 1867, he was court-martialed at Fort Leavenworth on seven charges, the most serious being that he had deliberately disobeyed orders of his superior officer, General Hancock, had deserted his command in the midst of hostile Indian country to hurry to Fort Riley where the cholera was raging and from which his beloved wife was writing letters filled with loneliness and terror and that he had ordered some of his officers to shoot down without mercy deserters from the regiment.

Former Custer biographers have either ignored or passed lightly over this court martial, but the fact remains that Custer was found guilty on all seven charges, suspended from rank and command for a year and his pay for that time forfeited. But before the year had passed Sheridan, who had more than once overlooked Custer insubordination, came to his rescue.

his people were no more hostile than they had been when members of this same band were the victims of Colonel Chivington and his Colorado troops at the Sand Creek massacre. But Sheridan's orders were, in effect, to "kill Indians" and Custer didn't stop to find out whether the village into which he charged that cold November morning was occupied by friendly or hostile Indians.

His tactics at the Washita were the same as those which brought disaster less than ten years later—a division of his command and a headlong attack on an "enemy" whose numbers were unknown. But he soon found that he had stirred up a hornet's nest, for Black Kettle's village was only one of several along the Washita. Threatened by warriors from the others, Custer hastily withdrew, even though Maj. Joel Elliott and 19 men in his detachment were still unaccounted for. Lieutenant Godfrey had reported hearing sounds of firing which indicated that Elliott was in distress. But Custer disregarded this and marched away, leaving Elliott to his fate.

His hasty withdrawal indicates that he had lost for the moment, at least, his belief that the Seventh could whip all the Indians on the plains. But he lost something else at the Washita—the undivided faith and admiration of the regiment and the confidence of some of his officers. From that time on the Seventh cavalry was a regiment divided against itself. Nor during the next eight years was Custer able to do anything which restored that shattered faith.

During the Yellowstone expedition of 1873 he had one run-in with his superior officer, General Stanley, and received a severe rebuke which caused him to be good thereafter—at least, so far as obeying orders was concerned. But he did rush into one reckless fight with the Sioux which nearly ended disastrously for him and which gave him a dangerous scorn for the Sioux as foemen. His expedition into the Black Hills in 1874 and his exaggerated reports of the richness of the gold there brought him a fleeting moment of fame, but this was soon overshadowed by the disgrace which overtook him when he became embroiled in the Belknap scandal.

Belknap, President Grant's secretary of war, was accused of graft in connection with sutler contracts at the army posts and impeached by congress. Custer "talked too much"—claimed knowledge which he did not have. Summoned to Washington to testify, he made a sorry witness. He was even so rash as to involve the President's brother, Orville Grant, in charges which he could not prove and to insinuate guilty knowledge of frontier graft by the President himself.

Naturally Grant resented all this. So Custer was not only deprived of the command of the expedition which was to be sent against the hostile Sioux from Fort Abraham Lincoln in North Dakota but was even forbidden to go with it. He made frenzied appeals to Sherman, commander in chief of the army, to Alfonso Taft, the new secretary of war, and to Grant himself. But none of them availed and this time not even his friend, Sheridan, could help him. Finally he appealed to General Terry, who was to command the expedition, and it was Terry who succeeded in getting him restored to the head of his regiment. It will be seen later how Custer repaid that favor.

Chief among the points in the controversy that has raged about Custer's defeat and death on the Little Big Horn is the question of whether or not he deliberately disobeyed Terry's orders, thereby breaking up a plan of campaign against the Indians which might have been successful. Van De Water's conclusion is that he did deliberately disobey, that he intended from the first to "swing clear of Terry" and by winning a smashing victory over the Sioux to regain favor with his superiors. So the Glory Hunter gambled—and lost!

When he lost he brought death not only to himself but to more than 300 others. And among them were three of his own blood—Capt. Tom Custer, a troop commander in the Seventh, Boston Custer and "Autie" Reed, the son of his half-sister, Lydia, who had been a "second mother" to him. Another of the Custer clan whose life was to be blighted by what took place on June 25, 1876, was his sister, Margaret Emma Custer, the wife of Lieut. James Calhoun, who perished on the hill above the Little Big Horn.

© by Western Newspaper Union.

CAP AND BELLS

SUCCESSFUL TOUR

"We must go to Stratford," a tourist on a visit to England said to his wife.

"What's the use of that?" asked she. "We can buy Stratford postcards in London."

"My dear, one travels for something more than to send postcards! I want to write my name on Shakespeare's tomb!"—Montreal Star.

And He Went His Way

Sinister-Looking Individual (significantly)—Is yer 'usband at 'ome, ma'am?

Lady (resourcefully)—Well, if he's finished his revolver practice, he'll be playing in the back garden with our bloodhounds. Did you want to see him?—London Tit-Bits.

SAFETY FIRST

"Why did you tell Freddy I wasn't in?"

"Well, dad said he was a cake-eater an' he ain't gonna eat any of that new cake ma just made."

Ambition

He—I'd like to write the most popular book of the day.

She—You think that is the way to fame?

He—I don't give a hoot for the fame, it is to fill a pocket-book, and that's what interests me.

The Whole Story

"Hello, Smith, old man, haven't seen you for some time."

"Been in bed seven weeks."

"Oh, that's too bad. Flu, I suppose?"

"Yes, and crashed!"—Montreal Star.

Back to Early Standards

"Are there any gangsters in Crimston Gulch?" asked the traveling man.

"No, sir," answered Cactus Joe. "We shoot things out for ourselves. The Gulch continues to favor rugged individualism."

Suspicious

The maid was cleaning the stairs the morning following a wedding reception, and picked up a spoon.

"Some guest must have had a hole in his pocket," she observed.—Ottawa Citizen.

Length, Not Breadth

First Voter—How long did the candidate speak, Bill?

Bill—About an hour and a half.

First Voter—And what was it all about?

Bill—He didn't say.—Exchange.

CO-ORDINATION

"College boys make both ends meet, all right."

"How's that?"

"Using headwork in football."

Hard Luck's Limit

They were discussing their bad luck.

"Do you know, Bill," said one, "my luck is so dead out that if I threw a dollar bill into the air it would come down an income tax demand note."

Her View of It

He—Would you marry for money?

She—Well, a husband with no money to me would be like a garage with no car in it.

Two-Piece Frock in Smart Design

PATTERN 2030

In this two-piece frock youth is delightfully served. Make it of one of the new fabric prints which look like wool, or of a smart sheer woolen. It suggests a suit in its trim lines and neat tailored finish. The yoke extends down the front to the edge of the jacket in a vest effect from under which a belt partly encircles the waistline. The bow at the neck is extremely attractive in velvet. Think of it in rust color with the frock in two shades of green. With the diagrammed sewing chart which accompanies the pattern, even a young girl can easily make the frock.

Pattern 2030 is available in sizes 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18. Size 12 takes



2 1/2 yards 54-inch fabric, and 1 1/2 yards 4-inch ribbon.

Send FIFTEEN CENTS (15c) in coins or stamps (coins preferred) for this pattern. Write plainly name, address and style number. BE SURE TO STATE SIZE.

Address orders to Sewing Circle, Pattern Department, 243 West Seventeenth street, New York City.

ALL IN ORDER

Big Railroad President—Well, I declare, there's a block system all ready for our new road.

Encouragement

At an English theater they were playing "The Forty Thieves," and as the company numbered only eight, the entry of the robbers into the cave was achieved by their passing out at the back of the stage and entering again at the front.

Unfortunately one of the robbers walked with a limp, and when he had entered five times a voice from the gallery cried: "Stick it, Hopsy; last lap!"

Warning

Mrs. R.—What made you count your change so carefully after paying our bill?

Mr. R.—The clerk kept saying that "honesty is the best policy."—Border Cities Star.

Cash Wanted

"Pay your taxes with a smile," advised Mrs. Gotrocks.

"I should love to," said Miss Comey, "but they insist on cash."

Not Missing Anything

Old Gentleman—Didn't I give you a dime just now in the High street?

Tramp—Yes, sir; I've got a branch office there.

The Leader

WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT GUM

THE PERFECT GUM