



'Visions of Glory'. By Richard S. Headley, 1992. Courtesy of Custer Battlefield Museum, Garryowen, Montana.

G. A. Custer: The Man

"...George A. Custer, dressed in a dashing suit of buckskin, is prominent everywhere... flitting to and fro, in his quick eager way, taking in everything connected with his command... with the keen, incisive manner for which he is so well known. The General is full of perfect readiness for a fray with the hostile red devils." So was the description by Mark Kellogg in his first column for the Bismarck Tribune on May 17, 1876.

Elizabeth Custer remembered her husband as *"...a figure that would have fixed attention anywhere. He had a marked individuality of appearance, ... not the least out of place on the frontier. He wore troop boots reaching to his knees, buckskin breeches fringed on the sides, a dark navy blue shirt with a broad collar, and a red necktie whose ends floated over his shoulder exactly as they did when he and his entire division of cavalry had worn them during the war. He was at this time thirty-five years of age, weighed one hundred and seventy pounds, and was nearly six feet in height. His eyes were clear blue and deeply set; his hair, short, wavy, and golden in tint. His mustache was long and tawny in color; his complexion was florid, except where*

his forehead was shaded by his... broad felt hat, that was almost a sombrero... for the sun always burned his skin ruthlessly.

He was the most agile, active man I ever knew, ...Horse and man seemed one when the general vaulted into the saddle. ...Yet every nerve was alert and like finely tempered steel, for the muscles and sinews that seemed so pliable were equal to the curbing of the most fiery animal."

These descriptions might sooner have been ascribed to Errol Flynn the dashing actor of the cinema who brought to life on screen the adventures of G. A. Custer in "They Died With Their Boots On." For many he epitomized the "Boy General" in swash-buckling flamboyance. Students of Custeriana often claim this film was their introduction to the story and lifelong interest in the Battle of the Little Big Horn. If there had not been such a man in real life, Hollywood would have invented him.

"Custer's face was not the face of a thoughtless, impulsive man." Wrote Annie Gibson Roberts, "it was the somewhat worn, but eager countenance of a man who had faced extraordinary responsibilities in youth; his eyes penetrating, his broad, massive brow was the brow of a thinker-not one who would rush into danger simply for the glory of it.



Errol Flynn as G. A. Custer in his exceptional portrayal for Warner Bros "They Died With Their Boots On" 1940. Courtesy of John Langellier.





Judge and Elizabeth C. Bacon.
Payette Collection Monroe Evening News.

Judge Daniel S. Bacon was as interested as anyone to hear fresh reports from the front and often had conversations with the celebrity captain. His reputation as a ladies' man soon developed; Fannie Fifield numbered herself amongst his conquests and boasted as much to the Judge's daughter.

Frequenting some of the drinking establishments was a favorite past time for soldiers on leave, and Armstrong Custer was never one to do things half measure. On one of his sporting sprees he stayed a little longer than he should have. Quite inebriated, he soon realized the most difficult time navigating home to his sister's house. Falling down he became sick in front of the Bacon house while the Judge and Libbie observed him from a front window. This wasn't good for his reputation or his future relationships with the Bacons. Sister Ann met him at the front door and with the "Good Book" ushered him into the parlor for some instruction. Although from that day on he never touched a drop of alcohol for the rest of his life, this single indiscretion proved to be the biggest hurdle to overcome as he attempted to impress Judge Bacon and win the hand of his only daughter.



Custer & McClellan with Lincoln. Custer is at extreme right of the photo.



Autie as a dashing captain.



Libbie's Graduation Photo, June 1862.

Meanwhile, Pope's defeat at Second Bull Run saw the reinstatement of General McClellan to Command.

Within a month the Army of the Potomac engaged the Confederate Army under General Robert E. Lee in what was to become the bloodiest day of the war. Twenty-Three Hundred Union troops lay dead on the field near Antietam Creek. It was said a person could walk the entire battlefield from one side to the other on the bodies of soldiers without having to touch the ground.

Ten days after the battle McClellan wrote the President: "This Army is not now in condition to undertake another campaign nor bring on another battle." One out of every four men who had marched into battle were dead, wounded or missing.

Once again President Lincoln insisted if he wasn't going to use the Army of the Potomac to let Lincoln borrow it; finally relieving McClellan and eventually replacing him with General "Fighting Joe" Hooker. Little more than a flash in the pan, Hooker is best remembered for his camp followers christened "Hooker's Women."

While on leave to Monroe in November of 1862, Armstrong received a formal invitation to a party held at the Boyd Academy where Libbie had graduated the June before as Valedictorian of her class.

Conway Noble, had triumphantly won the honor of escorting Libbie that evening but somehow had botched the whole affair and looked to his old

school chum to bail him out. Guest of Honor, recently promoted Armstrong Custer replete in his Captain's uniform approached Libbie for the introduction and was amazed at the beauty of Monroe's prettiest sweetheart.

"I understand your promotions have been quite rapid?" Became her first declaration.

"I've been most fortunate." Was his reply and most fortunate was the situation for him, duly smitten his "Custer's Luck" would come into extreme play and all his talents would be drawn upon to win this fair lady's hand.

Remembrance of Autie's drinking spree provoked Judge Bacon to forbid contact between the young couple. Custer not to be unhorsed showed up at numerous occasions even positioning himself strategically in the best pew of the Presbyterian Church the one that best observed Libbie during the worship service.

Through a mutual friend Annette Humphrey the couple began a flirting courtship that respected the Judge's admonition but dangerously fueled the flames of a storybook romance.

So madly in love was he with Libbie Bacon; that even his military sash proclaimed his affection, embroidered with her initials "L. C. B." which he told everyone stood for "Light Cavalry Brigade."

Upon his return to the front Armstrong learned McClellan had once again been relieved of command and he now reverted to the rank of first lieutenant.

distributed to posts and forts across the country, the Seventh was now being called together for the first time since the Regiment's creation. Two companies of the 7th Cavalry arrived at Fort Abraham Lincoln on May 5, and went into camp, they were soon joined by all the Cavalry and the Infantry assigned to the campaign who shook out their tentage. It had rained on and off through May 15, and that had contributed to their delay in order to dry out the canvas. While on Post the tents were set up in rows with company streets, on campaign these same soldiers would throw up their half shelters upon arrival into camp in any hap-hazard fashion. Usually the Troop that was packed and ready first would take the advance and lead out the regiment. ❖

Anxious and unable to sleep Armstrong sat up reading from a novel and underlined the passage: "I have faith in my own fortunes, and I believe I shall conquer in the end." It was the last book he would read, from a three-volume set "Her Dearest Foe." The author's last name was Alexander.

All at once, Libbie was jolted awake, having had a nightmare she described as a Cheyenne Brave holding a bloody blond scalp aloft. She reached over and ran her fingers through Armstrong's closely shorn locks. Now if she could only convince him not to wander too far ahead of the column.

At 4:00 AM on May 17, both she and Autie, were brought wide awake by the sound of reveille. At 5:00 AM "General" was sounded and the tents were



Custer's buckskins undoubtedly are one of his most significant trademarks and symbolic of his deep identification with the western way of life. The jacket and pants in the middle - same as the sombrero and gauntlets - are faithful replicas of the ones worn by the General at the Little Big Horn. The jacket was tailored according to period photographs and reports while the pants, made to be used with tall riding boots, are an exact replica of a surviving specimen. Custer was naked and stripped of all his belongings when found after the battle and none of these garments have since emerged. This buckskin would arguably be similar to the first one Custer had tailored in 1869; probably by Saddler Sergeant Jeremiah Finley, who may have produced also the second and surviving original jacket on the right. A fourth buckskin coat reported to have belonged to GAC sold on Ebay in 2005. Once

owned by Colonel Raymond Vietzen the elaborately beaded coat may have been sewn by Helen Soos Lewis, the half-Blackfoot wife of Robert Jackson one of Custer's Scouts during the 1876 Campaign. Only three of these jackets are recorded as they appear in this spread; all of them sporting fringes and military buttons. The one on the left is also an original piece although not appearing in any known period photograph. Unlike the others - both buckskins - this one was made from cowhide. It has been suggested that Custer, being of superstitious nature, would have liked donning old buckskins in campaign rather than newly made ones to prevent bad luck. Notwithstanding a simple demand for some comfort would seem a more reasonable explanation, especially when considering the long and exhausting rides usually preceding any battle during the Indian wars...



Mark Kellogg, Reporter for the Bismarck Tribune.



Boston Custer.

brought down and gear packed. By 7:00 AM all were in saddle and the procession was headed toward the fort. The Scouts led off the command with their

weird and melancholy singing, this kept up as the column swung past Laundress Row. The laundresses were tending to their sheets and white shirts hanging



Custer's Revolver Found at Little Big Horn?

1869 Tranter Bull Dog which hammer and other parts are unfortunately missing so that the firing pin mark cannot be tested.

Tom Custer's English pistols are inscribed on the ivory grips and if this gun was ever so inscribed, it would also have been on the ivory. Note that the gun is quite nicely engraved in very fine English scroll work.

When Mr. Aplan first acquired the gun he was offered quite a bit of money for it but as to this day, he is not prepared to sell it. According with a former Superintendent of the Custer Battle Field at that time, if they ever found a lead bullet from a .450 English pistol, they would try to match it up to this gun. The bullet would be unique as so would the rifling in this gun. As they have only metal detected a small portion of the battlefield as to this date, it may be some time, if ever before they find a bullet.

Mr Jim Aplan has been an avid collector/dealer for over 70 years and has owned many Custer artifacts, including the famous 1866 Winchester carbine that matched a cartridge found on the battlefield and sold for several hundred thousand dollars. He is also the owner of this revolver that was sold several years ago to a scrap iron dealer in Nebraska by some Sioux Indians from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Mr. Aplan heard about it and chased it down and bought the piece, fully aware of the story and wondering where the Indians would have gotten such a gun. That it could be the Custer's gun is somewhat open to speculation but there is no doubt that it was a fine piece in its day. It is a Model



Courtesy of Mr. James Aplan.