

GEN. George Armstrong Custer, the dashing cavalry leader who is most famous for his last engagement, spent more than two years in Kansas fighting Indians.

It was in these little known campaigns of 1867-68 that he was to enhance the reputation as an Indian fighter, which he later took with him to his tragic last stand at the Little Big Horn. The Kansas campaigns virtually ended organized Indian depredations against settlers though sporadic attacks continued, some of them deadly.

(The Star next Sunday will tell the story of the last of these, as related by still living survivors.)

But there is an ignoble side of the Custer legend in Kansas, too. He was court-martialed at Ft. Leavenworth on charges of abandoning his men in the midst of a campaign and returning to Ft. Riley to see his wife. He later left Ft. Leavenworth without paying a \$8.12 milk bill.

On a raid into Indian territory from Ft. Dodge he captured a 20-year-old beautiful Cheyenne girl, who the Indians say became his mistress and bore him a son.

Custer came to Kansas in September, 1866, when the Seventh cavalry was activated at Ft. Riley. In those years after the Civil war the army was officered by many demoted generals. All three of the top officers in the Seventh had been major generals in the war. The men were immigrants, drifters and veterans of both armies. One of the sergeants, a West Point graduate who had cast his lot with the South, served under an assumed name.

In a Chronicle.

Custer's activities against the Indians on the plains were chronicled by him in a series of articles that appeared in Galaxy magazine, beginning in May, 1872. Two years later these articles were collected into a book, "My Life on the Plains," which has just been edited and reissued by two publishers. The edition from the University of Oklahoma Press (418 pages; \$5.95) has an introduction by Edgar I. Stewart. Citadel offers a reissue in paperback edited by Milo Milton Quaife (625 pages; \$1.95).

The book is so interestingly written that one regrets that the author's literary career was cut short by an illiterate alliance of Sioux and Cheyenne. But it tells only one side (Custer's) and glosses over, or conveniently ignores, any happenings that damaged the fair-haired general's ego. For instance, allusions to the court-martial are so mystical that the reader unfamiliar with the case scarcely would know what he is writing about.

In his writing, Custer (he predates the time when generals employed ghosts) sometimes reveals a keen humor. For instance, writing about how the Indians obtained firearms:

"Each one (the warriors) was supplied with either a breech-loading rifle or revolver some-

times with both—the latter obtained through the wise foresight and strong love of fair play which prevails in the Indian department, which seeing that its wards are determined to fight, is equally determined that there shall be no advantage taken."

The Indian outbreak which Custer rode forth to try to quell had erupted at the close of the Civil war. It stopped the advancement of the frontier for many months. The Smoky Hill route was abandoned by stage coaches and mail couriers, and many of the stations had been abandoned.

Deadly Toll in 1868.

An 1868 summary lists 154 whites murdered, 14 women "outraged," one man, four women and 24 children captured, 669 horses and 958 cattle stolen, 24 houses attacked and burned, and 4 wagon trains destroyed. Only 11 Indians are known to have been killed while participating in these attacks.

In July, 1867, Custer's men arrived at Ft. Wallace, Wallace, Kas., after repeated skirmishes with hostile Indians. They were out of supplies and 200 miles from a railroad. Custer picked 200 men to ride to Ft. Harker, Ellsworth, Kas., which was the terminus of the Kansas Pacific railroad at that time.

At Ft. Harker Custer received, or believed he received, permission from a commanding officer to proceed on to Ft. Riley to visit his wife. But in a court martial Custer was convicted of leaving his command at Ft. Wallace without permission, and was suspended from rank and pay for one year. The Civil war general, noted for his daring, also was convicted of specifications that he made no attempt to recover the bodies of two slain troopers; that he ordered deserters from his command shot without trial, and that he refused to allow wounded men from his command to receive medical attention.

The only mention of all this in Custer's book is found in veiled admissions that he was not with the regiment for several months and this statement:

"I was living in involuntary, but unregretful retirement . . . compelled by circumstances over which I had no control to remain in the rear."

Called Back by Sheridan.

Custer spent the fall and winter at Ft. Leavenworth and later went home to Monroe,

Mich. However, his successors showed no talent for fighting Indians and General Phil Sheridan, exasperated, brought Custer out of his involuntary retirement.

In early November, 1868, General Sheridan set up headquarters at Ft. Hays, and Custer and his Seventh cavalry pushed south across the Canadian river to conduct winter operations. At dawn on November 23, 1868, Custer's cavalymen fell upon Black Kettle's Cheyenne village in the battle of Washita as the notes of "Garry Owen" played by the regimental band, reverberated in the crisp morning air.

The Indians were surprised, but soon fought back stubbornly in superior numbers. Custer found himself surrounded, far from his source of supply. He tells of his actions then:

"About 200 of my men were ordered to pull down the lodges in the village and collect the captured property in huge piles preparatory to burning." This was done in the most effectual manner . . . and all that was left of the village were a few heaps of blackened ashes."

Custer now found himself burdened by captives and 875 captured ponies. Enough horses to carry the captives were cut out of the herd. Then four companies of cavalymen moved in on Custer's order and slew the rest.

The battle of Washita was a victory that enhanced the fame of General Custer. Yet it was not won without serious tactical blunders on the part of the commander. He would make the same mistakes again a few years later, and fate would not be so kind.

With a foot of snow on the ground in the dead of winter, Custer had managed to lose the overcoats and knapsacks of his men, by ordering them left on the ground where the Indians could capture them. His biggest blunder, however, and the one that would prove fatal nine years later, was in attacking without adequate reconaissance.

By skillful maneuver, Custer was able at the Washita to effect a withdrawal with a number of prisoners, including the 20-year-old daughter of Chief Little Rock, Mon-nah-se-tah (The Young Grass That Shoots Up in the Spring). The general's rapturous description of her lends credence to the Indian stories that she became his mistress and the mother of a son:

"She was probably rather under than over twenty years of age. Added to the bright, laughing eyes, a set of pearly teeth, and a rich complexion, her well-shaped head was crowned with a luxuriant growth of the most beautiful silken tresses rivaling in color the blackness of the raven and extending, when al-

ON a day in June in 1876, Gen. George A. Custer led five troops of the 7th Cavalry down into the valley of the Little Big Horn for an encounter with disaster.

Custer had remained in Kansas almost a year after he returned to Ft. Hays with the rescued white women as related in the accompanying story; but the duty was mostly routine. After commanding a small post at Elizabethtown, Ky., Custer was ordered to Dakota with the 7th in 1873. His reports of gold there, after an expedition into the Black Hills, attracted settlers to lands set aside for the Indians and led to the Sioux war in 1876, which ended George Armstrong Custer's life, and the lives of 226 of his men.

The picture of "Custer's Last Stand" reproduced here was painted by a Montana artist, E. S. Paxson, and hangs in the rotunda of the Montana Historical society museum in Helena. The painting, 9 feet by 6, contains more than 200 figures in violent action.

Six of the surviving chiefs who participated in the battle posed for Paxson. Faces of the troopers were taken from photographs of the doomed men.

At the top center, General Custer clasps a gauntleted hand over a wound in his left side. Chief Gall of the Sioux raises his rifle in the air as he directs the charge. Half-breed scout Mitch Bouyer (in buckskins at right) aims his rifle at Chief Crazy Horse, who charges with war club raised. Near the center a trumpeter blows unheard calls for help from other units of the command.

oved to fall loosely over her shoulders, to below her waist."

Custer had hardly withdrawn from the battlefield on the Washita when he was reinforced by a regiment of volunteer Kansas cavalry commanded by the governor, Col. S. J. Crawford, who had placed the lieutenant governor in charge of the state house when he rode away to fight Indians. That year Kansas settlers in the fertile valleys of the Saline, Solomon and Republican rivers had been set upon often by the hostile tribes. Mrs. Morgan, a bride of 19, had been taken from her home after her husband was wounded from ambush in the field where he was working. Miss White, a girl of 18, was carried off in a separate foray.

A Second Try.

Now Custer headed a second expedition, this time with 1,500 troops. The main plan bogged down in endless negotiations with Indian leaders. The general pressed on tenaciously, however, and succeeded in persuading the Arapahoes to return to the reservation. It took longer with the Cheyennes, but the troopers pursued them and near the western border of Oklahoma Custer reclaimed the two young Kansas white women who had been captives many months. He was shocked by their appearance:

"They were clothed in dresses made from flour sacks . . . Both wore their hair in long braids and, as if to propitiate us, the Indians, before releasing them, had added to their wardrobe ornaments such as are worn by the squaws.

"About their wrists they wore coils of brass wire, on their fingers had been placed numerous rings and about their necks strings of variously colored beads."

Custer did not return several captured chiefs to the tribe, as he had promised to do in exchange for the women. Instead he took them to Ft. Hays. There Mrs. Morgan was re-

united with her wounded husband.

Thus ends Custer's narrative of his campaigns on the Kansas prairies. He says, quite correctly, that after the Washita campaign the Kansas frontier was comparatively free of Indian depredations. General Custer had cleared the way for the continued settlement of the state.