

**TRUE STORIES OF GREAT
AMERICANS. GEORGE
ARMSTRONG CUSTER**

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True stories of great Americans. George Armstrong Custer by Frederick S. Dellenbaugh

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FREDERICK S. DELLENBAUGH

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GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER



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Taken by Brady just after Lee's surrender. This was Custer's favorite portrait. He is in undress uniform. The wide hat was captured from a Confederate, and the blue flannel shirt was bought from a government gunboat on the Potomac River. The necktie was scarlet, a color adopted when he was made a brigadier-general at twenty-three, and worn also by his troops after that event. This photograph shows Custer at the age of twenty-five.

GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER

BY

FREDERICK S. DELLENBAUGH

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"Their noonday never knows
What names immortal are:
'T is night alone that shows
How star surpasseth star."

JOHN B. TABB.

New York

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PREFACE

WERE I reading of one unknown to me, I should close this book with the thought that it was the fairest and frankest story of an intrepid soldier that his greatest admirers might demand.

General Custer's victories in the Civil War are commended without exaggeration, his Indian campaigns described by one who perfectly understood the difficulties to be overcome and therefore could estimate at what cost success was attained.

So few do just what they want to do in this life. The author makes one know that he of whom he writes was one of that number.

General Custer was enthusiastic over his profession and entered upon his Indian campaigns commanding a few hundred men as buoyantly as when he had led thousands in the Civil War.

The responsibilities of the few leaders of the cavalry in the Army of the Potomac were very great. When sent on special expeditions, they often encountered the enemy at such a distance from the main command that it was as if they were a separate army; and it was impossible to

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receive instructions from headquarters, report engagements, or apply for reinforcements.

Sometimes the orders in leaving were short and verbal instead of long, formal, written documents, as is usual.

I remember one of General Custer's orders in starting on a long raid in Virginia, after he had won the confidence of his commanding officer by many successes. There were only six words in General Sheridan's forceful order: "Custer, go in and give them . . ." well, something very pyrotechnic.

He was thus at liberty to work out his own idea of the inferno, but he knew well that his conception quite corresponded to that of his chief.

But these raids were a great undertaking for those who were little more than boys, for they were answerable for so much. They lost every ounce of superfluous flesh and deep lines were carved in their faces.

The excellent likeness of General Custer shown in the frontispiece by Brady, the war photographer, taken after hard campaigns, looks more like a man of forty than one of twenty-four.

Even in the short pauses of those awful days of bloodshed in the Civil War, the General and his staff after an engagement begged to forget war temporarily and became rollicking, fun-loving lads.

The "boy" spirit appeared again in the General in his love of picturesque dress. But it was adopted also with the more serious reason that, as it was distinguished from most of the uniforms by its individuality, it would render it impossible for any of his men to mistake their leader.

There was youthful bravado also in wearing the wide sombrero captured from a Southern soldier. Due gratitude was given to this very hat in the Brady picture, when in charging into the lines of the foe he was taken for a Confederate. In the blinding dust and confusion of the *mêlée*, he saved his life by joining in the countercharge of the enemy into his own ranks.

The flowing red tie in the picture was apparently only the fancy of a youth for bright color, but back of it all was the knowledge that the bit of floating scarlet would be a beacon to his soldiers in the murk and grime and chaos of thousands of charging horses and in the blind fury of maddened men.

That General Custer has a historian who knew the West as a pioneer in the seventies, is most fortunate.

Mr. Dellenbaugh being the author of several books, most of them written out of his own experiences, is an authority on western life, and in narrating the history of the Frémont Expedition