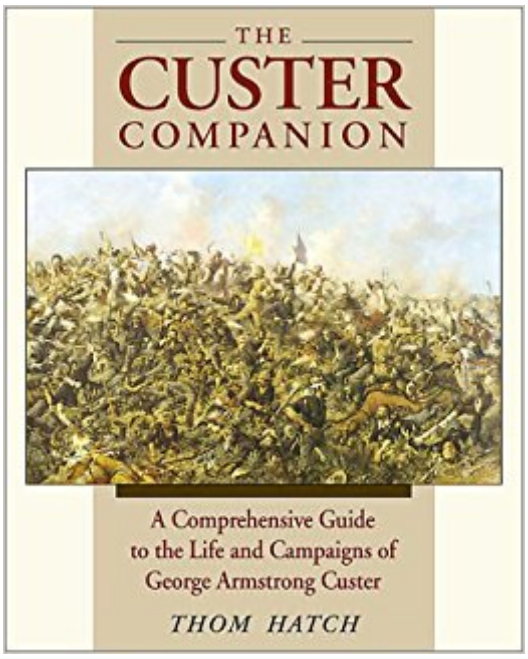
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The Custer Companion: A Comprehensive Guide To The Life Of George Armstrong Custer And The Plains Indian Wars



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Synopsis

Historian Thom Hatch’s exhaustive compendium of information of, and relating to, Custer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book does exactly what its title claims: it assists both readers and researchers in sorting through the mass of material on Custer. Each chapter contains an overview of a particular stage of Custer’s vivid life, followed by specific articles, biographical sidebars, maps, cavalry organization tables, and photographs. Each article and sidebar is accompanied by a bibliography of the most relevant books, articles, and archival collections. In this respect, it is a much different work from Custer hobbyist Hatch’s earlier encyclopedia, Custer and the Battle of the Little Bighorn, although both draw on the same body of literature. Here, Hatch concentrates on Custer’s post-Civil War career on the Plains, as a more than adequate number of reference works on the Civil War are available. But even so, he is selective in what he covers because his purpose is not to define but to guide. He is careful to include military forts, Native American tribes, and their leaders, and he covers the various controversies about the Battle of the Little Bighorn. All special collections on Custer will need this book as a reliable and impartial guide to the subject and literature, and it is also highly recommended for most public and academic libraries.Stephen H. Peters, Northern Michigan Univ. Lib., Marquette Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Thom Hatch is the author of numerous other works on Custer, including Custer and the Battle of Little Bighorn: An Encyclopedia and Clashes of Cavalry: The Civil War Careers of George Armstrong Custer and J. E. B. Stuart (0-8117-0356-8).

This is a well detailed overview of the life of General Custer from his roots to the aftermath of the LBH. The book is interlaced with a 100 or more biographies of all the key people associated with from family, soldiers, scouts, and politicians to Native Americans. The bios are outstanding and they fill in some holes even for the seasoned Custerphile. One example is the bio on Dr. Coates, the surgeon who served with Custer in Kansas and. Coates was a key witness on Custer's behalf in reference to the charge that he denied medical treatment for deserters. The bio covers Coates' short army career before and after the incident including his post army life. Another is Colonel Sturgis, the actual Colonel and actual commander of the 7th, who typically was on assignment or administrative duties deferring field command to Custer. In addition, when referencing a particular individual or place or battle, Hatch provides a detailed bibliography on the person or topic. When I read of the controversy regarding Custer's 1867 court-martial, the listed references led me to Lawrence Frost's detailed book on the subject. In addition to the bios sprinkled throughout the book are quotes by the General himself, which are highlighted outside the regular text, which adds depth to what Custer was feeling at that point in his history. It's also quite clear that he and Libby had one of the closest relationships in history. Although there may be more detailed works on the various prime subjects of Custer's life, this book captures it very well and closes ranks on information with people that intersected Custer's life from Reno, Benteen, Tom Custer, Belknap, Crazy Horse, Two Moons, Keough, Calhoun, Weir, Godfrey, Sitting Bull, Gall, Crazy Horse, Curley and on. The biographies sometimes seem a little redundant since they often overlap the text but they are well worth it. My only criticism was that there was not more on Lt. Wallace who was the timekeeper during the LBH command. Wallace appears to have aided and abetted Benteen and Reno at Reno's Court Martial. The fun part is at the conclusion of the LBH the author adds a little argument by critiquing other authors' views in what happened to Custer's brigade and he comes up with his own plausible theory. In Hatch's book, Reno and Benteen are held accountable for their wrong actions or inactions. A very good perspective and well worth reading as it even includes a review of the final Plains Indian campaigns.

I was seeking more information of the actual troopers who served with the 7th before and during the Souix Campaign of 1876. There are plenty of photos of the officers and bios but the emlisted

soldiers were unfortunaltely absent fo rthe most part. I was expecting at least a list of the troopers and some information of their race, ethnicity, backgrounds etc. I realize these were not necessarily model citizens but they were somewhat representative of the post CW military. I was hoping to be able to draw some comparisons to our "draft" army of the 1960's as far as compositions of troops.

Along with William A. Graham's "Custer Myth" and Paul A. Hutton's "Custer Reader", this book belongs on the shelf of any serious student of Custer's life and career. I do not often feel compelled to comment on books I've read, but this is one of those rare gems that comes along unexpectedly, just when you think that everything that can be said has been said.My library includes nearly every book ever written about Custer and I would rank Hatch's book with the best of them. Some of those books contain useful and fascinating information but are barely readable, but Thom Hatch manages to make his both fascinating and readable, and that is a laudable accomplishment for any historian. I also disagree with those who say this would not make a good introductory work; I think that on the contrary, it would make an excellent place to start. It covers the entirety of his life and career and leaves few facets unexplored or unremarked, from birth to pre-military teaching jobs to West Point, the Civil War and beyond.One of its strongest assets is the "for further reading" list appended to each section, listing the various works out there which can better inform the reader about the subject at hand. But this is more than an empty list of authors and titles; Hatch comments on the various books, judging them not only by what he has to say about them but what others have said as well. For instance, of Gregory J.W. Unwin's classic "Custer Victorious" he says "minor drawbacks to this exciting and well-written work is that some have claimed that it is too pro-Custer, with too much cheerleading, and that it - as the title suggests - concentrates on the battles when Custer was a general and fails to adequately chronicle his first two years of service and associated aspects of his career." This is particularly useful information for somebody new to the field of Custer studies and will guide them in picking and choosing their way through the vast library of Custeriana.Another strength of this book is the sidebars. These are useful and fascinating digressions into areas outside the main body of the text and discuss such things as tables of organization for various expeditions (a plus for the student of military history), "Military Forts on the Central and Southern Plains", "Custer's Mad Dash across Kansas", "Wild Bill's Showdown with Tom Custer", "The Joel Elliott Controversy", "The Arrest and Revenge of Rain-in-the-Face" and so forth. Better yet, associated subjects, though not directly pertaining to Custer, are not forgotten, so we are provided with information about the Battle of Beecher Island, not to mention a biographical sketch of Lt. Beecher himself, Red Cloud's War and the Buffalo Soldiers. These additions better round out the world in

which Custer lived and operated and allow the reader to understand the currents - historical, military and social - of his time.Complementing the sidebars are the biographies. These cover a variety of people, such as Sheridan, Benteen, Reno, Terry and the other "usual suspects" but also lesser known figures, such as scout William Averill Comstock, Captain Louis McLane Hamilton, Major Eugene Asa Carr, not to mention Native American leaders and warriors, not limited to Crazy Horse, Gall and Sitting Bull but including such figures as Roman Nose, Black Kettle, Satanta, Kicking Bird, and others. And these are not dry biographical sketches. His remarks on Winfield Scott Hancock are telling: "Hancock apparently urged Col. A.J. Smith to prefer charges against Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, branding him the scapegoat for this blot on the general’s otherwise exemplary military career." Of Captain Albert Barnitz, frequently cited by Custer critics, he says: "Barnitz wrote about Custer to his wife on May 15, ’He is the most complete example of a petty tyrant that I have ever seen.’ Perhaps that attitude could be partially blamed on he fact that Barnitz had been arrested for discarding forage and not feeding his horses."All in all, this is a very balanced treatment of the life and career of George Armstrong Custer. If Custer comes out favorably in these pages, I think it is only because Hatch rightly points out the absurdity of some of the positions his critics have taken, and it is a refreshing change of pace from those who, like Roger Darling, simply assume Custer must have ’gone nuts’ on the day of the Little Bighorn. No man lives in a vacuum and as this book demonstrates, the Little Bighorn cannot be taken out of the context of Custer’s life, career and experiences.In the end, the only criticism I can level is that due to the book’s organization the reader will be forced to flip back and forth as they read, and this is no real hardship at all given the wealth of information uncovered with every page. "The Custer Companion" is a delight to read. In a field that is possibly the most written about in American history, and home to such giants as Frost, Utley and Dippie, Thom Hatch’s accomplishment still stands out.

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