



A Complete Life of General George A. Custer, Volume 1: Through the Civil War

Frederick Whittaker

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In the election year of 1876 the Battle of the Little Big Horn was horrifyingly fresh to opinion makers, who divided along political lines in assigning blame. The late General George A. Custer, who had been a Democrat with aspirations to high office, was more pilloried than praised by President Grant and influential editors of Republican newspapers. Coming to the defense of Custer was Frederick Whittaker, who less than six months after the disaster published this first biography of him. *A Complete Life* was the beginning of a legend, and Whittaker did more than anyone else except Libby Custer to make the flamboyant Boy General a permanent resident of the national consciousness.

Quite aside from its contribution to the public image of Custer, this important book placed him and his associates against a concrete background of onrushing events. Drawing on newspaper reports and the general's own words, Whittaker captures the excitement of the era. In Volume 1 a boy's life in Ohio is made immediate. Then Custer's escapades as a cadet at West Point (where he was called Fanny because of his golden locks), his courtship of Judge Bacon's saucy daughter, and his singular service as a cavalryman in the Civil War are described in vivid circumstantial detail. From the first Battle of Bull Run through Gettysburg and the Virginia campaign he is seen in action, conspicuously defying death and winning promotion. Volume 2 deals with Custer's fighting in the West, ending with a memorable description of his last stand at the Little Big Horn in June 1876.

The introduction to Volume 1 is by Gregory J. W. Urwin, who won praise for *Custer Victorious: The Civil War Battles of General George Armstrong Custer*, also a Bison Book.

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