



General George Crook: His Autobiography

George Crook, Martin F. Schmitt

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General George Crook was one Civil War general who didn't win his reputation east of the Mississippi River. To him, the Civil War was just an interlude. Before and after this great conflict, Crook was an Indian fighter.

Crook fought the greatest of the Indian chieftains; served at frontier posts from the Columbia River to the Rio Grande, from Illinois to the Pacific. Yet he was as good at defending Indians as he was at fighting them. Crook understood and sympathized with them. He spoke plainly and often against injustices in the treatment of the Indian. And when he died, Red Cloud, chief of the Sioux, gave him his epitaph: "He, at least, had never lied to us."

General George Crook: His Autobiography first came into print when Martin F. Schmitt, working in the archives of the Army War College in Washington, made the startling rediscovery of the Crook papers, which had been presented to the library of the War College by the widow of Walter S. Schuyler, one-time aid to General Crook. The existence of the autobiography had apparently not been previously suspected by any writer on the West, not even by the General's friend, Captain John G. Bourke, who wrote the only existing sketch of his life.

A West Point graduate of 1852, General Crook spent his entire military career, with the exception of the four Civil War years, 1861 to 1865, on the frontier. His life paralleled western expansion during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1890, at the time of his death, he was commanding general of the Department of the Missouri, the largest and most active of all frontier commands. The Rogue River and Yakima wars in the eighteen fifties, Paiute pacification in the late sixties, the Apache campaigns of the seventies and eighties—all found Crook actively involved, fighting, counseling and making peace with the Indians.

His Civil War experiences, while not uniformly successful or profitable, brought him into close contact with the great military figures of the day. He was a favorite of Grant's and a close associate of Sheridan, who had been in his class at West Point. His blunt, sometimes caustic opinions of his associates and the conduct of campaigns are new and often refreshing.

General Crook's autobiography covers the period from Crook's graduation from West Point in 1852 to June 18, 1876, the day after the famous Battle of the Rosebud. The editor has supplemented it with other material, some from the Crook diaries and letters and contemporary clippings, on the other years of the General's life.

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