



Comanche and His Captain

The Warhorse and the Soldier of Fortune

By Janet Barrett
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No Soldier survived the fight at the Battle of Little Big Horn where Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer took his "Last Stand" on the afternoon of June 25, 1876 against an overwhelmingly superior force of Indian warriors. Two hundred and ten men of five 7th U.S. Cavalry companies lay dead by nightfall. Yet, two days after the battle, "Comanche" was found by a burial detail—alone and wounded, but still standing. He was the warhorse of the Company I commander, Captain Myles Keogh.

This remarkable warhorse was nursed back to health and returned to Fort Abraham Lincoln (near Bismarck in the Dakota Territory) for special duty. Having become a sacred and celebrated hero, Comanche was awarded the honorary title of the Regimental "Second Commanding Officer" in General Orders No. 7 issued on April 10, 1878 by the 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment Commander, Colonel Samuel Sturgis. And there's so much more leading up to and following that ceremonial honor.

A veteran officer and soldier of fortune from the Irish Battalion in the 1860 Papal War, Myles Keogh came to the United States and joined the Union Army. Keogh became a highly respected Irish immigrant who earned his reputation personally advising and fighting with a series of Union generals from McClellan to Grant, and several others in between, throughout the Civil War and into the Reconstruction period.

But Keogh itched for more action. He learned that the U.S. Army was forming new cavalry regiments to secure the frontier, so he aggressively went after the opportunity to serve in one of them. Not surprisingly, his Civil War connections landed him a regular army commission and a position in the newly formed 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment on July 26th, 1866. He was off to Fort Riley and the next phased Manifest Destiny challenges and adventures of the Frontier.

So why is "Comanche" the ostensible main character of Janet Barrett's brilliant work? Because Ms. Barrett presents a captivating, noncontroversial review of military history that we're familiar with, but from the unique perspective of a true horseperson. Only a fervent horse lover (she's also author of *They Called Her Reckless*, a U.S. Marine warhorse of the Korean War) could pull this off.

This book very cleverly and most refreshingly takes the reader through a barrage of painstakingly researched and accurately cited interpretive history. The course of this journey is set from 1860 (with predicate background information going back as far as the 1600s) and goes to Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (Fair), where Comanche's taxidermic likeness was an extremely popular exhibit. We also learn that even today we can visit Comanche in Dyche Hall at the University of Kansas.

So, it is the inimitable story of the remarkable warhorse, Comanche, that enables us to discover the heretofore largely unacknowledged gallant, accomplished cavalryman, courageous warrior, and truly heroic Irish American, Captain Myles Keogh. And indeed, we are reminded of the exceptional bonds between our cavalry ancestors and their indispensable, brave mounts. A highly respectable, enjoyable read!

**By COL Doug Harris, U.S. Army Retired
Armor/Cavalry Officer**

As a major, COL Harris served as Squadron XO, 1st Squadron, 10th U.S. Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers), 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Carson, CO. Little reported in Cold War era history, the unit was redesignated 2nd Squadron, 7th U.S. Cavalry (Garryowen) for a time before 4th ID was restationed to Fort Hood, TX in 1995.