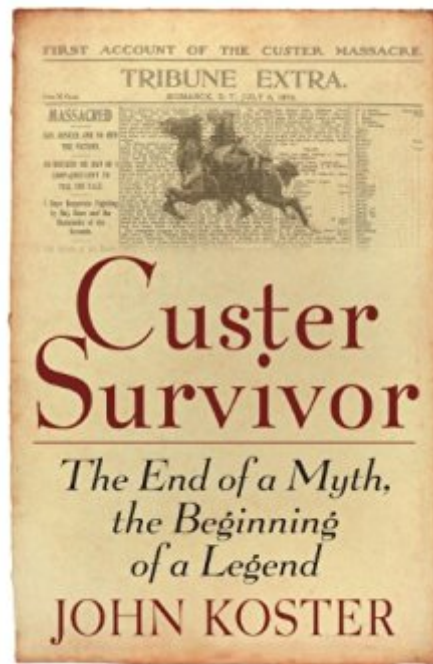


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Custer Survivor: The End Of The Myth, The Beginning Of The Legend



Synopsis

Custer Survivor was the basis for History Channel's television documentary Custer's Last Stand about the one man in the Seventh Cavalry who escaped the annihilation at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It is the story of Sgt. Frank Finkel of "C" Company, who, stunned by the impact of a rifle barrel smashing his forehead, was carried off by his panic stricken horse. Drawn from Sioux observations, Dept. of Army documents and forensic evidence, this is the story of the one soldier who escaped death at Little Big Horn and the fascinating life story of the man who turned myth into legend.

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Customer Reviews

The whole contention of this book is that Frank Finkel was really Sgt. August Finckle of Company C, reportedly killed in the Custer fight on the Little Big Horn. But the problem is that Finkel only claimed to be Sgt. Finckle when the original name he gave, Frank Hall, could be found on no known rosters. But author Koster claims Finkel never used the name Frank Hall. He claims it was a lie made up by Finkel's second wife Hermie Billmeyer and offers up a plethora of bizarre reasoning to prove it. CUSTER SURVIVOR drags us through a painful array of genealogist and so called handwriting

experts who verify the author's claims. But not so fast. In a 1921 interview with Finkel in the Walla Walla Bulletin, written by W.H Banfill, himself a student of the battle, Finkel said he enlisted under the name "Frank Hall" so that his parents wouldn't find out. In another version Finkel said he "rode back to Ft. Benton and was discharged." He even says so in CUSTER SURVIVOR (pg.109). The 1921 article/interview was given four years before he even met Hermie Billmeyer. So much for research. When no military papers could be found on Finkel he simply changed his story and stated, "I never had any discharge papers from the army for I was never discharged. There was none of my command left to apply to (some 24 soldiers of C Company survived the battle) and I wasn't going to chase all over the country to find some one to discharge me. As far as the army was concerned, Frank Hall was reported dead along with the rest of Custer's men and I let it go at that." That quote comes straight from Finkel himself in 1921.

This book is the record of a couple of frauds; Finkel himself, who, even if his story was true, was a deserter, who lied when convenient, starting when he enlisted. And his widow, who after manipulating the aging Finkel into giving her the majority of his holdings and cheating his children out of the rest, went on to try to cheat the government, attempting to get a widow's pension. Thank goodness she was unsuccessful in her endeavors. I saw many other inaccurate and implausible examples. One of the most glaring was that Lakota Rain in the Face, supposedly identified, or an unnamed "Indian Women" identified Finkel and told Rain in the Face that she recognized Finkel in Chicago forty years after the Custer battle, when in 1876 Finkel got no closer than rifle range of the village and on a moving horse? How could either of them recognize a random elderly white man who at best they had got a fleeting glimpse of or seen slumping down wounded on a speeding horse forty years earlier? Other little mistakes are some of the Native Americans in the photographs are mislabeled, Crawler is one, labeled as "Ice-Cheyenne". Crawler was one of the first Lakota to see the 7th Cav approaching and extensively photographed and interviewed concerning what he had seen. Tom Custer, may have been on paper a Troop Commander, but served as his brothers 'aide de camp". Captain Myles Keogh, commanded Custer's right wing and Second Lieutenant Henry Harrington Commanded C Troop, the Troop that the real Finkel was a sergeant in. If Finkel survived the battle, assuming that you believe his story, could have faced punishment, but getting to civilization or one of the other columns for medical treatment would have been paramount to his survival.

This book is an inconclusive and somewhat rambling argument. It is interesting, and provides a bit

of insight for the times, but the core of the evidence to prove the case is quite weak. We mostly have only personal statements of Mr. Finkel as transcribed by others, newspaper reporters among them. I have been interviewed for several newspaper and magazine stories, and it has always pained me that they rarely were as accurate as I would have preferred, and when I once asked for a correction from a major U.S. newspaper, that request was refused. Thus, it isn't clear to me what we can make of the newspaper reports of Mr. Finkel's story. Mr. Finkel's second wife apparently muddied the story even more. There are apparently no photographs of Mr. Finkel's wounds, and no doctor ever reported on the nature of the wounds? The one bullet which was expelled by Mr. Finkel's body late in life is no longer available? No other survivors from the 7th Calvary apparently met with Mr. Finkel after Mr. Finkel came forward as a purported Custer command survivor? One of these people would have likely recognized him, I would think, or they could have shared stories that would have validated Mr. Finkel's claim. We can't say that these meetings were avoided. Traveling long distances in the time that Mr. Finkel came forward was not that easy, and it was less easy for those who were elderly. My father often told me that traveling in the early 30s from their home in Northern NJ to his aunt's home in southern CT was an all day road trip, requiring up to 12 hours. Mr. Finkel was likely relatively much more isolated in his home town in Washington State.

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