

# Primary Source: Comanche, the Army Horse and Hero

from "The Tribune" (San Luis Obispo, California) June 1, 1878

*On June 25, 1876, the U.S. Army 7th Cavalry under the command of Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer engaged in battle with Native Americans, including the Lakota, the Dakota, and the Arapaho tribes. The army troops were vastly outnumbered. All the soldiers with Custer when the battle began, totaling five companies of men, were killed. It was a great disaster for the U.S. Army. The battle generally called the Battle of Little Bighorn also became known as Custer's Last Stand.*

*There was, however, one survivor of Custer's companies who returned to the U.S. Army. That survivor was Comanche, an army horse, who had been ridden into battle by Captain Myles Keogh, an Irish American officer commanding Company I. While other horses may have survived the battle, they were likely captured by the Lakota and Arapaho warriors. Comanche, however, was badly wounded during the battle, so was not captured. He was found about two days later by other army troops. He was taken back to an army fort where he was nursed back to health.*

*In 1878, the Seventh Cavalry honored Comanche, and issued General Orders about his future role in the army. As the story spread Captain Keogh's bravery, and Comanche's strength and courage, newspapers across the U.S. published the General Orders honoring the survivor. Many publications, such as the article below from the San Luis Obispo (California) Tribune on June 1, 1878 included a poem in honor of Comanche.*

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## Old Comanche.

General Orders No. 7  
Headquarters Seventh U.S. Cavalry,  
Fort A. Lincoln, Dakota, April 10, 1878

I. The horse known only as Comanche, being the only living representative of the bloody tragedy of the Little Big Horn, June 25, 1876, his kind treatment and comfort should be a matter of pride and solicitude on the part of every member of the Seventh Cavalry, to the end that his life may be prolonged to the utmost limit.

Wounded and scarred as he is, his very existence speaks in terms more eloquent than words of the desperate struggle against overwhelming numbers, of the hopeless conflict, and of the heroic manner in which all went down on that fatal day.

II. The commanding officer of Company I will see that a special and comfortable stall is fitted up for

him, and he will not be ridden by any person whatever, nor will he be put to any kind of work.

III. Hereafter, upon all occasions of ceremony (of mounted regimental), Comanche, saddled, bridled, draped in mourning and led by a mounted trooper of Company I, will be paraded with the regiment.

By command of Brevet Major General S.D. Sturgis, Colonel Seventh Regiment.

Ernest A. Garlington.

First Lieutenant and Adjutant Seventh Cavalry.

Honor to old Comanche,  
The sole survivor he  
Of the fierce fight where Custer died  
With all his chivalry

Honor to Keogh's charger!  
Only his flashing eye  
Saw the Three Hundred fighting--  
Saw the Three Hundred die!

His was the place of honor,  
Where his Irish rider fell,  
When the Seventh rode into the valley,  
That blazed like the mouth of hell!

The horse is part of the soldier;  
He mixed his blood with theirs;  
Therefore for old Comanche,  
All comforts and no cares.

For him free stall and pasture  
While strength and life remain;  
And let no living rider  
Bestride his back again!

But when the bugles summon  
The Seventh to parade,  
Saddle and Bridle Comanche,  
In sable housings arrayed;

And let a trooper lead him,  
The horse that saw Custer die,  
Forth to the place of honor  
In the front of Company I!

Will he neigh to his fellows, whose riders  
Fell on that fateful morn?

Will they hear him amid the trumpets  
Out on the Little Big Horn?

Honor to old Comanche,  
While life and strength remain!  
But O, to see the Captain  
Upon his back again!

## Questions

1. What was Comanche to do during ceremonial occasions?
2. What form of figurative language is "When the Seventh rode into the valley, / That blazed like the mouth of hell"?
3. What does *charger* mean here: "Honor to Keogh's charger"?
4. Why do you think the Seventh Cavalry honored a horse?