

Custer's Last Secret Was Well Kept

By FREDERICK C. OTHMAN

WASHINGTON, Nov. 19— Now it develops that the long-concealed military secret of Custer's last stand wore skirts.

Gen. George Armstrong Custer had a lady friend along at the disastrous battle of the Little Big Horn. The



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military man who revealed the secret described her as a camp follower. He said she was "a very amorous type."

The implication was that if Gen. Custer hadn't been paying so much attention to this pretty one, he might have escaped the Cheyenne Indians of Sit-

ting Bull and Crazy Horse.

The question before the House Government information subcommittee headed by Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.) was why the military had chosen to conceal for so many generations the illicit romance of Gen. Custer. It turned out that our fighting men are and always have been gentlemen.

They didn't want to hurt the feelings of Gen. Custer's widow. My

expert said the powers-that-be decided to sit on the official report on Custer's girl friend so long as Mrs. Custer lived.

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HE SAID when she died many years later, no one seemed interested. Nobody brought up the subject, in fact, until Rep. Moss and Co. tried to locate the record of the general and his girl friend.

As late as last week, said one of the congressional operatives, he got nowhere in his efforts to get the official word on the general's lady-love.

Now the congressmen had before them Vice Adm. John M. Hoskins (retired), whose official job was to empty some of those 100,000 file drawers containing military secrets dating all the way back to the American Revolution and taking in all wars and most Indian skirmishes since then.

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ADM. HOSKINS said he and his staff were doing their dead-level-est to rub the top secret, secret, and confidential stamps off numerous innocuous documents. He also said the Department of Defense had cut down drastically the number of men entitled to put their rubber stamps in red on papers they thought nobody else should see.

"But in my 40 years in the Navy

I've never heard of a man being court martialed for over-classifying a paper," said the white-mustached admiral. "That's the trouble."

One of his assistants testified that documents stamped secret went back only to 1917. This startled the congressmen. What, they asked, about the secrets of the American Revolution and the Civil War still hidden from the public? These weren't military secrets, insisted the admiral's helper. He said they merely were unavailable—for any one of numerous reasons.

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"WELL, what about Custer's last stand?" demanded Rep. Dante B. Fascell (D-Fla.).

"That now is released," said the witness. The congressmen then changed the subject, and I got to a military man who filled me in on the lady present at the Custer massacre. My man did not want to be identified in print; Gen. Custer's affair de amour seems to be a touchy subject around the Pentagon.

The historians can take it from there. They can dig into the ancient files and identify the lady by name. I'm abandoning the story, myself.

Fact is, I wish the boys had continued to keep it secret because I've always been an admirer of the general.