

Perspectives in Military History

50th Annual Lecture Series

General of the Army Omar Nelson Bradley Memorial Lecture

The Custer Conundrum

Exploring Leadership and the Contradictory Life of George Armstrong Custer

T.J. Stiles

Pulitzer Prize Winner for Autobiography and History

George Armstrong Custer proved himself a highly capable commander from the battlefields of the American Civil War through the hills of Texas, to his final moments on the Great Plains. On Wednesday, October 18, 2017, the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC) will host Mr. T.J. Stiles, recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, as he presents a lecture entitled, “The Custer Conundrum.” The lecture will examine the complicated nature of leadership principals in the U.S. Army through the lens of the peculiar combination of Custer's skills as a combat leader and failings as a regimental field commander.

Brevet Major General of U.S. Volunteers during the Civil War and later, a Lieutenant Colonel in the 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment, George A. Custer was a highly skilled tactician and inspiring figure in battle, but failed to manage his men well in non-kinetic settings, whether in Texas in 1865–66 or on the Great Plains over the next decade. He also developed a problematic reputation within the army that complicated his relationship with his superiors, who often assumed the worst about him. Custer's career sheds light on the U.S. Army itself, and its role in the transitional time during the push west across the continent in the Post-Civil War years. The Army represented the leading edge of modernization in the United States, introducing finely articulated organization, professionalization, and technical expertise into an individualistic country that was transforming into a corporate, organizational economy and society. Custer was both a highly trained professional—a technical expert—and a romantic individualist; his volatile nature emphasizes the broader themes of this transition. His self-destructive tendencies lead to a story, which highlights the peculiar demands the Army faced in conflict with Native peoples on the Great Plains.

Mr. Stiles is an award-winning author and recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 2010 and for history in 2016. He graduated from Carleton College with distinction in history and received his Master of Arts and Master of Philosophy degrees from Columbia University. He worked alongside top American historians at Oxford University Press, before starting his extensive writing career publishing, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, *The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*, and *Custer's Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America*.

DATE: October 18, 2017

TIME: Doors open at 6:30 PM and the talk begins at 7:15 PM

PLACE: USAHEC, Visitor and Education Center, Multipurpose Rooms

For updates and any last minute changes in meeting times/places, please check the

USAHEC website: www.USAHEC.org or call the Information Desk: 717-245-3972.