

George Bent, also named *Ho-my-ike* in Cheyenne

Private

1st Missouri Cavalry Regiment



George Bent was born at Bent's Fort, owned and operated by his father William Bent, a major fur trader from St. Louis, Missouri. His mother was Owl Woman, daughter of a Cheyenne chief, and he was born into her clan under the maternal kinship system. Bent and his three siblings grew up speaking both Cheyenne and English at home. He learned much about Cheyenne culture from his mother and her family, and in their culture was considered Cheyenne.

In 1853, Bent and his siblings were sent to a boarding school in Westport, Missouri that taught Native American children alongside white children. Their father wanted the children to have an education similar to other wealthy Americans. Bent became friends with many young people from rich Southern families, but never really felt that he belonged to white American society.

In 1857, after completing his primary education, Bent was sent to St. Louis and placed in the care of Robert Campbell. Campbell was known for freeing his slave and taking numerous children of color under his wing. Under Campbell's care, George Bent attended Webster College.

George was seventeen when the Civil War started in 1861. In May of that year, Union troops were marching Confederate prisoners through the streets of St. Louis when shots were fired and the Union soldiers began firing into the crowd. Many were killed and the city was outraged. Bent and most of his friends at Webster College witnessed this and decided to join the Confederate army.

Bent served in the Missouri State Guard during the War Between the States, fighting at the Battle of Oak Hills or also known as the Battle of Wilson's Creek near Springfield, Missouri, on August 10, 1861; and at the First Battle of Lexington near Lexington, Missouri, on September 20, 1861; both were Confederate victories. As a member of the 1st Missouri Cavalry Regiment, he fought at the Battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas, March 6–8, 1862, which was a Union victory. When the Missouri cavalry was converted to infantry, Bent became attached to Landis' Battery, Missouri Light Artillery, the horse artillery of General Mathew F. Greene's Missouri Brigade; this was part of General Sterling Price's division. His artillery unit participated in the siege and retreat from Corinth, Mississippi, April 29 to May 30, 1862, where it stayed behind to cover the retreat of 66,000 Confederates under the command of P.G.T. Beauregard.

Later that summer, Bent was captured. After his capture he was returned to St. Louis, which was Union-controlled, he was briefly confined in the Gratiot Street Prison, but was allowed to swear an oath of allegiance to the Union and be released to his guardian, Robert Campbell, a prominent St. Louis citizen assigned to him when Bent was in school.

Bent returned to his father's ranch in Colorado Territory, but anti-Confederate sentiment was intense there. For safety, he went to live with his maternal Cheyenne relatives. From that time on, Bent lived among the Cheyenne and identified with them.

Bent was at Black Kettle's camp of Cheyenne and Arapaho at Sand Creek about 35 miles north of Lamar, Colorado, on November 29, 1864. The Indians in the camp had initiated peace negotiations with the U.S. Army, and believed they were under its protection, but Colonel John Chivington and his force of 700 Colorado volunteers attacked the village. They killed about 150 Indians. Bent was among the Indians who fled upstream and found shelter in sandpits dug in the creek bed beneath a high bank. In revenge for the Sand Creek massacre in January 1865, he rode with an Indian army of 1,000 warriors in a successful attack on Julesburg, Colorado, in

which they killed many townspeople and soldiers. Bent participated in 27 Cheyenne war parties, but never gave many details about his personal role in the Indian wars.

Bent was an interpreter at the Medicine Lodge Treaty Council of October 1867. Bent impressed the U.S. soldiers and officials with his negotiating skills. In 1868, Bent was hired by the U.S. government as an interpreter, first at Fort Larned and later for the newly created Indian Agency headed by Brinton Darlington. Because of his knowledge of both European-American and Cheyenne culture, Bent became a prominent and powerful person. During the first several years, he tried to moderate hostilities between the two cultures.

He became prosperous by assisting European-American cattlemen to obtain grazing leases on Indian land. Because of his influence peddling, he lost the trust of some Cheyenne and was fired as a U.S. interpreter. But in 1890, he was the crucial go-between to persuade the Cheyenne and Arapaho to accept plans for allotment of land by individual households under the Dawes Act.

George Bent died on May 19, 1918, at Washita, Oklahoma in the 1918 Flu Pandemic. In 1968, George E. Hyde's book, *Life of George Bent: Written from His Letters* was published, and in 2005, David F. Halaas, and Andrew E. Masich published a book on George Bent, entitled *Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent-- Caught Between the Worlds of the Indian and the White Man*.