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Don Russell: Expert-Author Of West *He's A Friend Of Custer*

And Buffalo Bill

by GREG MAHONEY

Don Russell, 151 Clinton av., Elmhurst, knew Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

Through born 23 years after Custer was killed at the Little Big Horn and only eight years before Cody died, Russell knew these men as surely as if he had ridden in the 7th Cavalry or had travelled with Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows.

Russell, 69, is considered one of the foremost experts on the American West and the Indian Wars of the 1870's and 1880's. A retired newspaperman, he has written several books on the West and the white and red men who fought over it. He has also edited several other collections of Western lore and is read in several languages, including Spanish, German, French, Italian and Japanese.

A native of Indiana, he "knows" Custer and Buffalo Bill through the many years of research he has done

into the lives and times of these men. He is also "well acquainted" with men like Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull and Daniel Pope Cook, the man whose newspaper championed the admission of Illinois into the Union in 1818.

RUSSELL IS presently Cook's successor as editor of "The Illinois Intelligencer." The paper, originally published in the early 19th century in the Kaskaskia area, has been slightly updated to served as the information medium of the Illinois Sesquicentennial commission. Typography and makeup of the paper follow that of the original "Intelligencer" as closely as possible.

"I know I work harder at this than Cook did," Russell laughs, explaining that the Kaskaskia publisher (after whom Cook county was named) was, among other things, circuit court judge, congressman and land owner, and gave publishing as few hours as he could.

Russell, the author, recently had published "Custer's Last," a book discussing the action and background of the several hundred paintings and illustrations of the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The book tells of the more than 900 illustrations relating to the massacre, including a series of 41 sketches done by Red Horse, a Sioux warrior who was at the battle.

Russell is sympathetic to the yellow-haired cavalry officer, explaining that "there is a lot of exaggeration about Custer. He was a good fighting man, a lot like General Patton. They both had the same problem: They never opened their mouth but they put their foot into it."



Don Russell was born in Huntington, Indiana, in 1899, and was educated at Northwestern University and the University of Michigan. He served in infantry in World War I. He has been a resident of Elmhurst for fifty years. He was reporter, copy editor, and editorial writer for newspapers, including the Chicago Journal, Chicago Daily News, and Chicago Tribune. He was editor of the yearbook of American Peoples Encyclopedia Britannica, and Dictionary of American History. He was managing editor of the Illinois Intelligencer for the Illinois Sesquicentennial.

He is author of the award winning, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, 1960 and of *Custer's Last*, 1968, *Custer's List*, 1969, *The Wild West, A History of Wild West Shows*, the *Adam Bradford, Cowboy* series of juveniles, 1970, *Sioux Buffalo Hunters*, 1962. He is editor of *Campaigning with Crook*, by Capt. Charles King, 1964, *Five Years a Dragoon*, by Percival G. Lowe, *Trails of the Iron Horse*, by Western Writers of America, 1975, and six more, contributions and introductions to seven more books, numerous articles in historical journals and magazines, and 3400 published book reviews.

He is an honorary life member of the Western History Association and of the Chicago Civil War Round Table, honorary president of the English Westerners' Society, life member of the Kansas State Historical Society, honorary member, National Cowboy Hall of Fame, member of the Illinois State Historical Society. He has edited the Westerners Brand Book on Chicago Westerners for 31 years.

enough for a ~~man~~ to become good friends with these men and their associates.

So . . . what about Custer?

"CUSTER WAS a good soldier, but he had his faults. I doubt if I would have liked him."

Or . . . Wyatt Earp?

"Wyatt was not what you would call a high-classed character, but he was a good man for his time."

Or . . . Crazy Horse?

"He was a good fighting man, but he never really did too much for his people."

Or . . . Sitting Bull?

"A great leader."

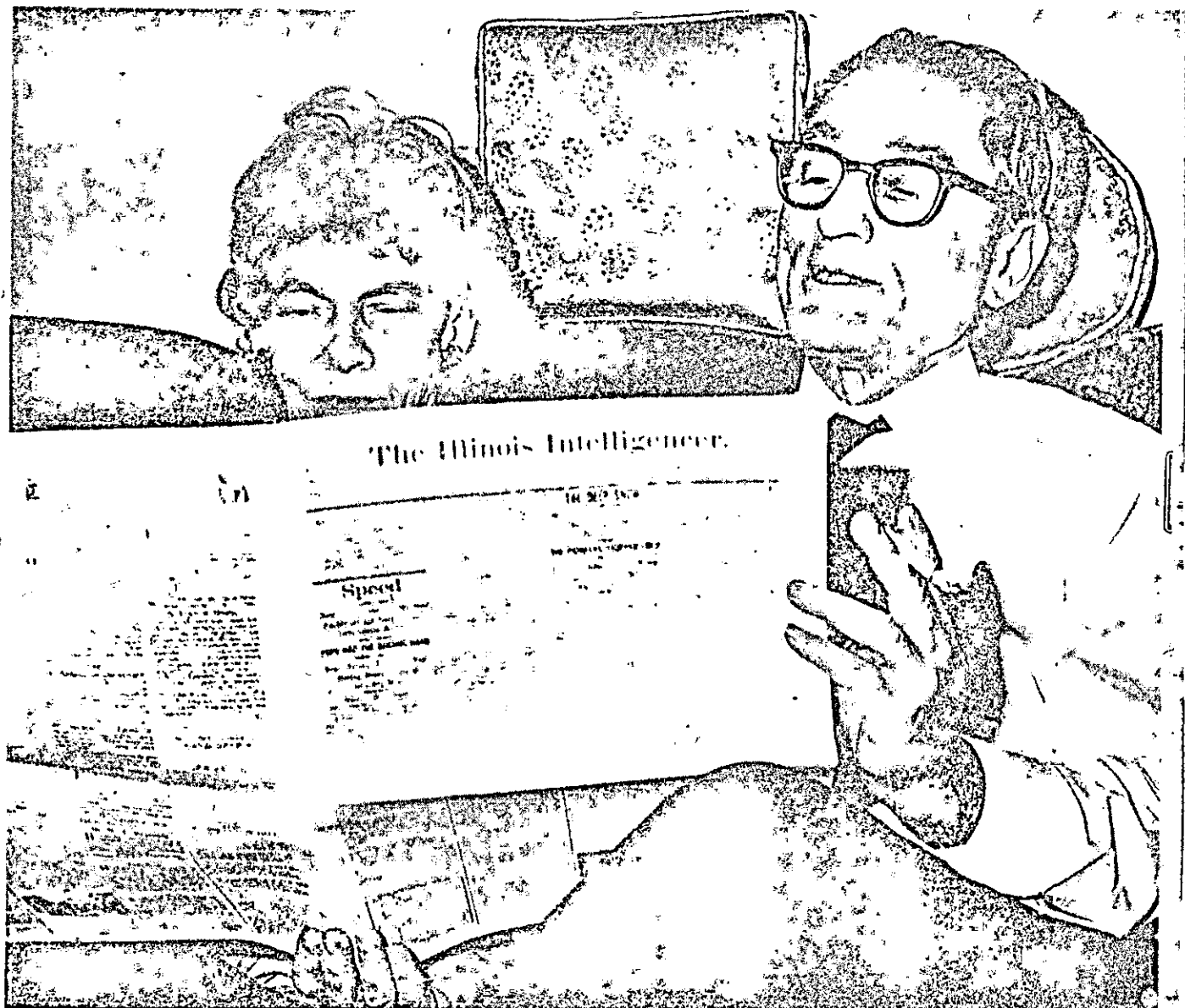
Or . . . Don Russell?

"Well, they'll never write a book about an author."



THE WRITINGS of Don Russell on the Sioux Indians are read by Western-loving Frenchmen, Spaniards and Italians through a colorful book published by Encyclopedia Britannica.

(Press Publications Photo)



WHAT DO EDITORS do when they retire? Don Russell of Elmhurst, for one, writes books on the old West and serves as managing editor for an updated version of a newspaper that was circulated in Illinois

150 years ago. Russell shows his wife, Ruth, the latest issue of "The Illinois Intelligencer," published by the state's Sesquicentennial commission in Chicago.

(Press Publications Photo)



NEWS FROM SAIGON has special interest for Mrs. Jack (Dorothy) Russell and her son, Matthew, 8. Jack, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Don Russell, 191 Clinton av., Elmhurst, is a reporter and broadcaster for NBC radio in Vietnam. Two generations of Russells listen to WMAQ every morning to hear the voice of their favorite radio newsman.

(Press Publications Photo)

Col. Custer In Vietnam?

How would Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer have fared in Vietnam?

Don Russell, the Elmhurst resident and author who has studied Custer and his career, thinks the impetuous cavalry officer might have done quite well in Vietnam.

"Vietnam is Custer's kind of war," Russell says. "There are many parallels between Vietnam and the Indian Wars. If Custer wasn't tied down he would've been a good officer in Vietnam, but I'm afraid that he would have been hurt by all the restrictions that this war seems to have."

Custer's 7th Cavalry regiment is serving in Vietnam, Russell adds, as part of the air mobile 1st Cavalry division. The regiment's tradition, even its Custer-era trooping song, "Gary Owen," is still intact.

BILL CODY COMES BACK

Elmhurst Scholar Comes to Aid of An Old 'Friend'

By Lelia Beyerman

FOR DON B. RUSSELL, LIFE HAS BEEN ONE BATTLE after another.

His wars fall into two categories: the personal one (as declared on all mankind) and those of others who have starred in great historical engagements.

THE FIRST COMES in the course of living. The latter Russell can't stop either, because since he was a boy his interest has been irrevocably drawn to regimental and army history.

Always able to settle his own scores, it was not until recently that he could do as much for an "old friend" who was fast becoming a victim of quick-buck press agency.

One of Russell's favorite historical "friends" is William F. Cody, the American scout and showman called Buffalo Bill whom he met in Huntington, Ind., in 1916.

BECAUSE HE believed Cody made contributions of great import to the country and deserved more respect than succeeding generations gave him, Russell felt compelled to write his biography — one that sorted the fact from the fancy.

It took him 10 years in his spare time to turn out "The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill," 514 pages of it.

"Surely no other scholar of our generation can add significantly to the story of one of the West's most illusive figures as it is set forth in this superb biography," writes Ray Allen Billington, author and professor of history at Northwestern university.

The purpose here is not to review Russell's book. Experts have and are still doing it with all the kudos at their command.

THE INTENT IS to salute a neighbor on a work called by the experts "a minor miracle of historical scholarship."

Colleagues refer to Russell as Mr. Westerner. Enter the workroom in the basement of his home at 191 Clinton av., Elmhurst.

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ALL THE counterments of the title are there. In files and piles, on the walls and desk and hanging from the ceiling are posters, programs, post cards, original photos, photostats, publications, dime novels, and 200 books relating directly to Buffalo Bill.

Any time Russell runs out of typewriter ribbons, he can tap an artery. He's been writing since he could hold a crayon.

On his high school paper he reported, made up and served as business manager. Uncle Sam interrupted his studies at Northwestern university. Later he received his degree at the University of Michigan.

Russell is editor of the monthly paper, "The Westerners Brand Book." For eating money he works at the New Standard Encyclopedia.

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ASKED WHAT TITLE he held there, Russell replied, "Let me look in a book. Ah, yes, it says here I am, senior associate editor."

Sixty-two year old Russell is a newspaper man from way back.

He worked for the Indianapolis Star, Louisville Post, Atlanta Georgian, Herald American, Chicago Journal, Chicago Daily News, Examiner, Chicago Tribune, and Rotarian magazine.

"Got canned off all of 'em except one," he said.

Mr. Westerner has "lived" with Buffalo Bill so long that it's hard to tell which one killed Yellow Hand. Maybe someone should write "The Lives and Legends of Don Russell."



TEN YEARS and 514 pages later, Don B. Russell of Elmhurst completes "The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill," a biography of William F. Cody. The workshop in Russell's basement is filled from floor to ceiling with original photographs, dime novels, posters, programs and 200 books relating directly to the famous scout and showman.
(Press Publications Photo)



A STUDENT of regimental and army history, Don B. Russell, 191 Clinton av., Elmhurst, decided it was time to strip the myth and fancy, compounded by sensational press agency, from the life of a

great figure of the west. It took him 10 years in his spare time to write the book, heralded by reviewers as a minor miracle in scholarship.

Burying myths on the lone prairie



Don Russell, considered an authority on Buffalo Bill Cody, shows two of the books he has written.

By Stirling Morita

DON RUSSELL loves the Wild West, but he'll seldom take in a western or read a novel about the era. That's too much hokum and media-spun yarns that are enough to peeve a historian.

"My quarrel with the movies is that part of the West is built up on mythology, and they keep on it rather than getting back to something authentic," explained Russell, 191 Clinton Av., Elmhurst, author of 10 books on the Old West.

For instance, there's the classic showdown between the good guy in the white hat and the bad gunslinger, slowly pacing toward each other on a dusty, deserted street at sundown, hands itching to slap leather and draw the trusty six-shooter.

RUSSELL DOESN'T think such street battles ever occurred or at least, he said, he hasn't been able to find documentation of such fights. "A lot of them got shot in the back mostly with shotguns."

Violence in the westerns is overrated, Russell said. "There was not as much violence as you would think. Professors who teach history are affected by these things. They believe it happened."

Or there's the crooked sheriff who is always in league with the outlaws. "As far as I can tell, it happened only twice, but it happened in the movies thousands of times," Russell pointed out.

AND THEN THERE are the massacres of Indians. He said he has been able to document the slaying of only about 5,000 Indians in the 19th Century.

But, the 77-year-old former newspaper man, who sports a western string tie around his neck, does have occasion to enjoy a few westerns. "Paleface," starring Bob Hope, entertained him because it made fun of the superstitions and myths surrounding the West. And the Walt Disney movies on the "Great Locomotive Chase" and about backwoodsman Davey Crockett drew praise from Russell.

He said he realizes there has to be some room for drama in movies, but that it can be included to mesh accurately with history.

RUSSELL HAS written on many phases of the West, ranging from the ironhorses to Gen. George Armstrong Custer. In fact, Russell is considered one of the leading authorities on Custer and Buffalo Bill Cody. His most popular book, which is into its fourth printing, is "The Life and Legend of Buffalo Bill."

Russell discounts the theory that the reason for Custer's reckless attack at the Little Big Horn was to garner glamor for the 1876 presidential campaign.

"Custer was a fighting man. That glory hunter complex can be overstressed," Russell said. "No one is so consistent as to always be a glory hunter."

HE ADDED THAT HE believes the fact there was a presidential election the same year as the massacre was merely a matter of coincidence.

Russell said the characters should always be thought of as people. "I always try to think first of all that these people are all ordinary people. What they did was not all bad, but not all good, either."

"I don't view any of them as being idealistic. It is doubtful that they always did things right."

RUSSELL SAID that although the herding of Indian tribes into reservations, chiefly in the Oklahoma Territory, is viewed nowadays as brutal and unfair, the reservation movement was started "with the best intentions."

He views the Indians as a smart people, whose "methods of making war made more sense than ours. If they weren't going to win, they got out of there."

To find the facts for his books or contributions to other books, Russell digs back as far as he can go. "The best bet is to find something like letters written at the time."

THE OLD WEST "has barely been touched," he said, and many of the old history books, which don't have bibliographies, were written chiefly for amusement.

Russell considers himself a conservative historian and bases many of his views on the fact that he was born in a small Indiana town just before the turn of the century. He has written introductions to books and thousands of book reviews and is involved in writing the "History of Elmhurst." He is also editor of "Westerners Brand Book."

In 1968, he edited and wrote most of the *Illinois Intelligencer*, a remake of the first newspaper in the state, for the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission.

HE SAID HIS URGE for writing came as a natural result of reading books, a pastime that offered him some form of entertainment in his small town.

At one time, his interest in the Civil War was strong, but when he was assigned to do a story for a newspaper supplement magazine about Gen. George Crook, he developed strong feelings for the West. He sent the article to Gen. Charles King, a Milwaukee resident at the time, who had written about Crook, and King was pleased in finding a newspaperman interested in the Indian Wars. King later proved to be Russell's contact to the military fraternity.

Russell's first book was about a Gen. Reuben Bernard and was titled "One Hundred and Three Fights and Scrimmages."

But heroes or not, they should be thoroughly researched, he said. He wrote in an article about himself: "I am intolerant of those who pass on as legends the lies they are too lazy to investigate; of writers who rush into print ignorant of their subject; of pedants who prove their lack of prejudice against popular minorities by exhibiting their prejudice against the majority..."

"History's enduring value lies in the interpretation of the present from the past. It loses all its values when we try to interpret the past from the present."



Carl Sandburg: a little shy

ELMHURST SECTION Wed., Aug. 25, 1976 2

Writer stops to remember when

By Stirling Morita

DON RUSSELL keeps a volume of children's poetry with his most treasured books.

On the inside is written in unusual script:

"Who knows what this is all about, which maybe ain't much as between friends and fellow workers. — Carl Sandburg."

What Sandburg, famous poet and writer, was modestly alluding to was a collection of poems in his book "Early Moon."

RUSSELL, 77, OF 191 Clinton Av., Elmhurst, knew the famed poet quite well.

They would occasionally ride the train together to go to work at the Chicago Daily News from Elmhurst, where Sandburg lived in the 1920s.

"He was odd," Russell recalled. "He seemed a little aloof at times, a little shy of attention."

SANDBURG LIVED in a house near York Street and St. Charles Road, but the site is now a church parking lot. It was only a few blocks west of a junior high school that was later named in his honor.

Russell has seen a lot of Elmhurst. After all, he has lived in the city for nearly 49 years. Russell is also a writer of some renown, specializing in books on the Old West.

Elmhurst's historical society and Bicentennial commission have sought him out to write the "History of Elmhurst," the first comprehensive publication about the city. A local group has compiled extensive research. "It's going to be an easy job for me. I'm not required to do any research at all," he said.

RUSSELL HAS just completed a similar project for Randolph County in southern Illinois and, was editor and a writer in 1968 for the Illinois Intelligencer, a resurrected version of the state's first paper for the state sesquicentennial celebration.

"This was the West. A century and a half ago, there was nothing here but Potawatomi [Indians]," Russell said. "Elmhurst was a frontier community for a long time."

Elmhurst's name long before the city was incorporated was Cottage Hill, which Russell noted was an offshoot of Hill Cottage. Hill Cottage derived its name from a house on a hill near York and St. Charles. "In this county, it wasn't unusual for a town to have two or three names before it settled down," he said.

IN THE OLD DAYS, Elmhurst was isolated by swampland between it and Chicago. Russell said Elmhurst has still retained some of its small town character, adding, "It never was much of a society place particularly."

At First Street and Addison Road, where there presently is a bank, a tavern used to stand. Russell said when Prohibition was declared in the 1920s, the tavern was simply boarded up.

About 10 years later when Prohibition was lifted, the owner came back, took off the boards, and opened the establishment.

He added that he didn't think there were any speakeasies in Elmhurst during the '20s, noting that people probably brewed their own beer and wine.

ONE OF ELMHURST'S outstanding resident artists was G. P. A. Healy, who painted one of the first portraits of Abraham Lincoln shortly after Lincoln's nomination for President in 1860. "He probably painted more portraits of Presidents than anyone else. The White House is full of them," Russell said.

One of Russell's favorites was J. Christian Bay, essayist and former librarian for Illinois Tech. "He wrote quite a lot," Russell recalled. "He made talks, and I used to follow him to Glen Ellyn just to listen to him."

"I always considered him quite outstanding."

THE CITY HAS changed since the days when Russell moved in. "The character has changed tremendously," he said. "It's become an enormous commuting city."



Don Russell has been asked to prepare a history of Elmhurst, which he believes has retained its small townness.

Wesleyan University, A.B., 1924; University of Cincinnati, A.M., 1926; University of Chicago, Ph.D., 1933. *Politics*: Democrat. *Religion*: Lutheran. *Home*: 603 University Ave., Selinsgrove, Pa. *Office*: Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, Pa.

CAREER: University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, instructor in history, 1926-27; DePauw University, Greencastle, Ind., 1927-33, started as instructor, became assistant professor of history; Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, Pa., professor of history, 1933—. *Member*: American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, Pennsylvania Historical Association (president, 1951-54), Pi Gamma Mu, Phi Mu Delta, Masons (32nd degree).

WRITINGS: *The Hawaiian Revolution (1893-94)*, Susquehanna University Press, 1959; *The Hawaiian Republic (1894-98) and Its Struggle to Win Annexation*, Susquehanna University Press, 1961. Contributor of eighty articles and more than thirty reviews to various journals.

WORK IN PROGRESS: *The Boundaries of Pennsylvania*.

SIDELIGHTS: Likes travel and has visited Alaska, Hawaii, Canada, Mexico, Europe, and the Soviet Union. Took a world tour, 1964.

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RUSSELL, Don(ald Bert) 1899-

PERSONAL: Born 1899, in Huntington, Ind.; son of Oscar Elwood and Ethel (Bert) Russell; married Ruth Holsenbeck, 1922; children: Elaine Canfield Jones, John Robert, Martha-Jane Bissell. *Education*: Attended Northwestern University, 1916-17, 1919; University of Michigan, B.A., 1921. *Home*: 191 Clinton Ave., Elmhurst, Ill. *Office*: Standard Education Society, 130 North Wells St., Chicago 6, Ill.

CAREER: Newspaperman in Chicago, Ill., from 1923-50, on *Chicago Journal*, copy reader, 1923-25, *Chicago Daily News*, editorial writer, 1925-46, *Chicago Tribune*, makeup editor, 1947-50; *New Standard Encyclopedia*, Chicago, Ill., senior associate editor, 1950-53, 1956—. *Military service*: U.S. Army, Infantry, two years in World War I; became sergeant. U. S. Army Reserve, 1925-41, as first lieutenant. *Member*: American Historical Association, American Military Institute, Illinois State Historical Society, Kansas State Historical Society (life member), Montana State Historical Society (honorary), The Westerners, Society of Midland Authors, English Westerners' Society (London; honorary president). *Awards, honors*: Friends of Literature, Chicago, best book award, 1961; honorable mention, Society of Midland Authors; Spur Award, nonfiction, Western Writers of America, 1962.

WRITINGS: *One Hundred and Three Fights and Scrimmages*, U.S. Cavalry Association, 1936; *Invincible Ike*, Successful Living, Inc., 1952; *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1960; *Sioux Buffalo Hunters*, Encyclopaedia Britannica Press, 1962; (author of introduction) Captain Charles King, *Campaigning with Crook*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1964; (editor, with introduction and notes) Percival G. Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1965. Contributor to military and history journals. Editor, *The Westerners Brand Book*, 1946—.

WORK IN PROGRESS: *Custer's Last Fight* (pictures), for Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth.

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RUSSELL, Ray 1924-

PERSONAL: Born September 4, 1924, in Chicago, Ill.; son of William James and Margaret (Otto) Russell; mar-