

HISTORY & FOLKLORE

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Satanta: Chief of the Kiowas

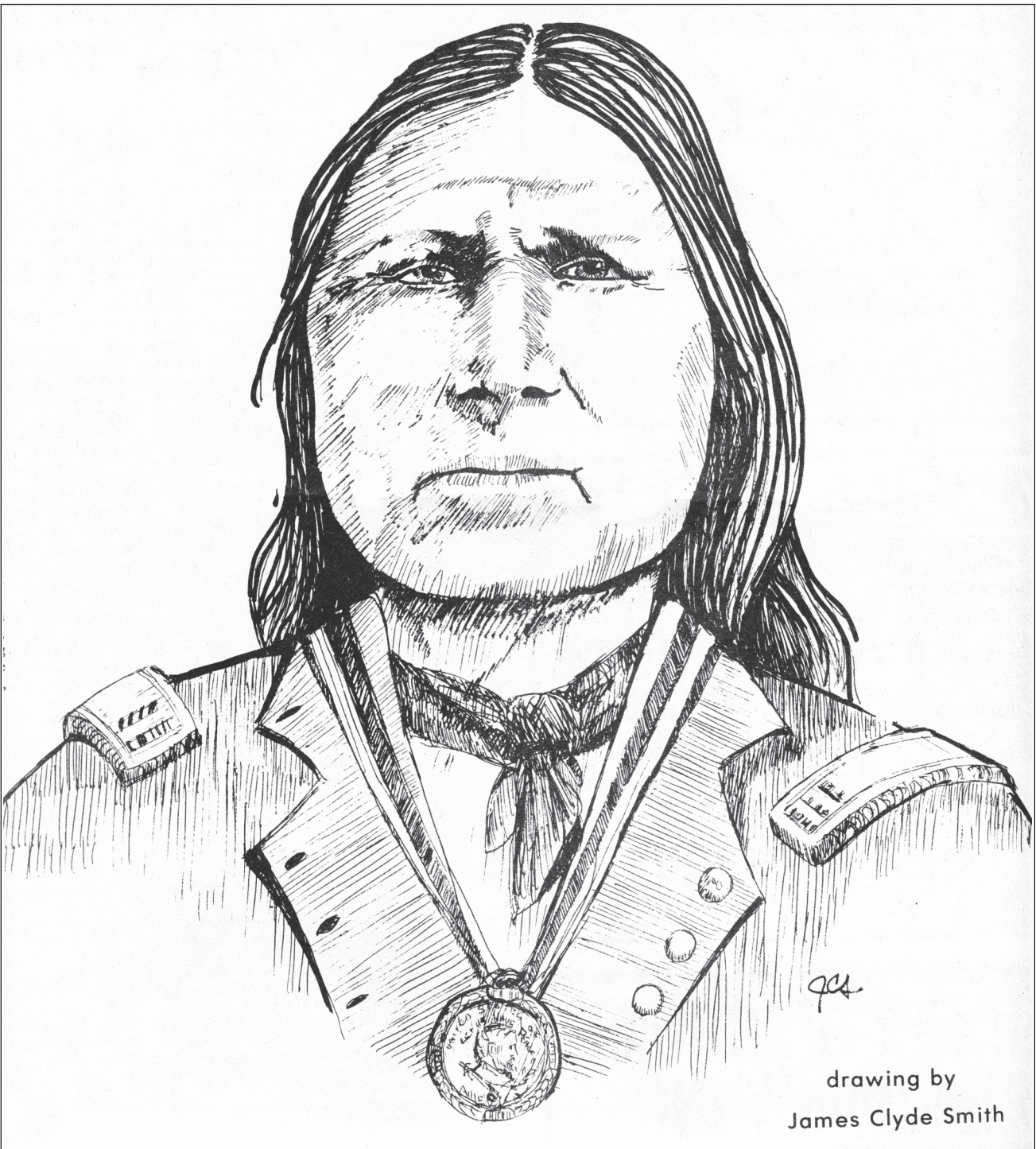
Satanta was born about 1830. While yet in his twenties he was elevated to the rank of chief because of his intrepidity and fearlessness. He was tall, athletic, reckless and bold on the hunt and on the warpath, arrogant and talkative in the council. He was conspicuously successful in war, against both hostile tribes and the white settlers of Texas, New Mexico and Kansas. He was particularly active in raids on the Texas border before, during, and after the Civil War. In 1867 when he visited Fort Larned, Kansas, on a peace mission, General W.S. Hancock was so impressed with his sincerity that he gave him an officers uniform, which Satanta wore a short time later in a thieving raid on the post's corral.

Satanta was regarded as an able Indian diplomat, being present and taking part in several conferences with Federal commissioners. He signed the treaties of the Little Arkansas (October 18, 1865) and Medicine Lodge (October 21, 1867) and served as the principal orator at the later council, after which he was popularly called the "Orator of the Plains." In his farewell speech he

closed his remarks by saying, "Your people shall be my people and peace shall be our mutual heritage."

But peace was not the mutual heritage of the two races. In fact, Satanta was one of the first to break the treaty, when he refused to accept the reservation set apart for his people. The Comanche, Cheyenne, and other tribes followed him in war and it was necessary for Major General Philip Sheridan to launch a winter campaign against them in 1868. Sheridan captured Lone Wolf and Satanta, the two principal Kiowa chiefs and put them in prison. He freed them a short time later, however, when they promised to accept reservation restrictions.

In March 1869, Sheridan left Indian Territory, announcing that the wild tribes were pacified, but Satanta and his Kiowa continued to be troublemakers, raiding the Texas border as before. In 1871, with more than 25 warriors Satanta destroyed Henry Warren's wagon train and killed seven of the teamsters in the Salt Creek Massacre. General W.T. Sherman, who was at Fort Sill when the



drawing by
James Clyde Smith

One who saw him in prison in 1873 described him as "a tall, finely formed man, princely in carriage, on whom the prison garb seemed elegant; he had as much dignity and grace as a monarch."

His memory is cherished by the Kiowa people as one of their greatest men.

boastful Indians returned, arrested Satanta, Big Tree and Satank. Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie was then ordered to take them to Jacksboro for trial, but when the wagons in which the prisoners rode moved out, Satank sought to escape and was killed.

Satanta and Big Tree were tried in Judge

Charles Soward's Thirteenth District Court and sentenced to be hanged, but their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment and they were placed in the Huntsville penitentiary. Governor Edmond J. Davis paroled them in 1873, when official pressure from Washington was brought on

him. The Texas Legislature, Generals Sherman and Sheridan, and others condemned the governor's decision and even the most ardent supporters of clemency admitted a few weeks later, when these same chiefs led their warriors in renewed raids, that they were in error. Satanta was again arrested

and returned to the penitentiary, but Big Tree made his escape. To Satanta, imprisonment was worse than death; consequently, on October 11, 1878, he committed suicide by jumping from a second-story window of the penitentiary hospital, head foremost to a brick wall below.



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