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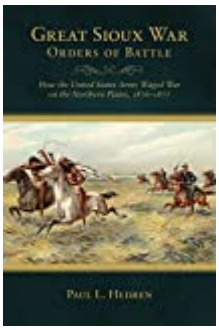

Paul L. Hedren. *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle: How the United States Army Waged War on the Northern Plains, 1876-1877.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. 240 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8061-4322-4.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Fighting for Reputation: The Soldiers Who Fought the Great Sioux War

Almost from the time that European settlers set foot on North American soil, they have been engaged in conflict with Native Americans. Although the U.S. military was involved in these hostilities almost continuously from the nation's founding until after World War I, the U.S. Army rarely considered these wars worth studying, preferring to focus on and prepare for what they deemed conventional conflicts. Natives were either glorified as mythical warriors or denigrated as untrained and powerless aborigines. Therefore, relatively little effort has been made to study the U.S. armies who fought them. Paul L. Hedren, in *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle*, fills in one segment of this gap by focusing attention on the armies that fought the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne from 1876 to 1877.

Concerned with historians' perceptions of the army that fought in the Great Sioux War as "untested,... filled with inexperienced recruits and the dregs of society, [and with] ... no formal doctrine for unconventional warfare," Hedren argues that this was not the case (p. 9). Instead, he shows that the army was well led, well trained, and well equipped. Reviewing the backgrounds of each officer involved in the conflict, Hedren proves that a significant portion of the leadership was educated at West Point and experienced in combat, and, specifically, trained and experienced in combat against Indians. He argues that tactics developed by Emory Upton in the 1860s were "well suited to Indian warfare" but contends that new recruits learned further tactics from experienced troops when recruits joined their units (p. 36).

The book is not a narrative history of the Great Sioux War. Hedren expects his readers to be familiar with the conflict itself and focuses instead on the U.S. Army that fought in the war. He looks at the personnel who fought the war for the United States: their training and experience, weapons, uniforms, and tactics, and the military culture they developed. He also admits that the study is rather one-sided since not much information is available on the native side of the story. Hedren does not focus on battles either. When referring to the conflict at Powder Horn River, he notes without explanation that "after they had driven off the occupants and captured their ponies,

the tide turned against the soldiers" (p. 45). Instead, he concentrates on the war's twenty-eight deployments, defining these deployments as actions that occurred during the timeframe of the Great Sioux War and that exposed the soldiers to the threat of conflict with native warriors whether conflict occurred or not.

Hedren divides his book into three parts. In the first portion, he sets the stage for the Great Sioux War, describing the political and geographical conditions in which the conflict took place and the capabilities and disposition of the U.S. Army as the hostilities began. He identifies the military education and experience level of the war's leaders and briefly details changes to army uniforms and weapons since the Civil War. The second section consists of short accounts of each of the twenty-eight deployments during the war, followed by a list of all officers engaged in each deployment. Again, since Hedren presumes that his readers are already familiar with the battles, he does not provide much detail on combat actions, but rather focuses on the order of battle and logistics. Hedren's third segment, titled "Reflection and Analysis," includes a five-page account of the Great Sioux War, a succinct review of the written remembrances of the conflict and the changes it influenced in modern military education, a brief discussion of casualties, and a five-page analysis of why a "well-led" and "capable" army struggled so mightily to defeat the Sioux and their Lakota allies.

Hedren's final analysis undermines much of his thesis. He explains that "judgment and leadership fail[ed] as officers confront[ed] battlefield circumstances beyond their experiences or outside the anticipated norm and where being well schooled, well drilled, and well armed was simply not enough" (p. 173). At Powder Horn River, he notes that "the Cheyennes were defending women and children, their village, and their way of life, and they fought with a resolve quite different from that of [Captain W. F.] Reynolds's troopers" (p. 174). Hedren states that General George Armstrong Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn was caused by his "innate impulsiveness and self-confidence" and illogical decisions, but then notes that Custer and his "commanders and their battalions never particularly influenced the battle beyond its initiation. Instead they were driven by the actions of the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne" (p. 176). He concludes that "on this day at Greasy Grass these Sioux and Northern Cheyenne fighters were emotionally charged to defend their homeland, freedom, and way of life. These circumstances at Little Big Horn were without parallel in the North American West and existed for a mere moment before vaporizing" (p. 177).

Thus, if only the natives throughout the Americas had been more "emotionally charged to defend their homeland, freedom, and way of life," they would still control the nation's heartland today. This is touching sentiment, but it does not ring true. Native tribes from the East Coast to the West Coast were all but exterminated because they fought with determination to defend their homes and families. However, European and American militaries fought and destroyed them. Therefore, there has to have been more to these significant defeats than emotionally charged fighting.

Hedren admits as much when he notes that Reynolds's officers' "judgement and leadership fail[ed]" and Custer's defeat was caused by "innate impulsiveness and self-confidence." If General Philip Sheridan's officers could not handle being confronted with "battlefield circumstances beyond their experiences or outside the anticipated norm," their losses were not caused by emotionally charged fighting, but overconfidence and incompetence. If he believes that the U.S. Army of the time was well prepared for Indian warfare, Hedron should have better explained these critical failures rather than dismissing them with the premise of unique emotional fighting. By his own reckoning, they failed to follow their own guidance of fighting winter wars, using early morning attacks and "classic offensive warfare" (p. 169). When these guidelines were followed, the U.S. Army quickly won the conflict.

Despite problems with his analysis, Hedren's book provides an informative look at the U.S. Army in the West during the Great Sioux War. He clearly shows the education and training of the army's officers and senior enlisted leadership. He also provides individual reviews of the numerous deployments involved in the conflict. This reader would have preferred more maps, as Hedren only provides one and does not show the details of any deployments on this map. However, he includes seven appendices, showing the U.S. Army regiments and companies that fought in the war and listing their campaign experience after the Civil War; the officers involved in the conflict, detailing their education and combat experience; and the conflicts and casualties incurred in the fighting. Students of the Great Sioux War can use this study, along with narratives of the war and archival resources reflected in the work, to guide their research into Sheridan's army.

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