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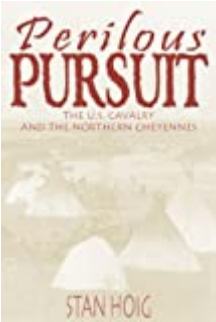

Stan Hoig. *Perilous Pursuit: The U.S. Cavalry and the Northern Cheyennes.* Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002. ix + 280 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87081-660-4.

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Bumbling on the Cheyenne Trail

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The story of the desperate flight of the Northern Cheyennes from their incarceration in Indian Territory to their homeland in the north is an often-studied event. Stan Hoig returns to the story of that exodus in his new work *Perilous Pursuit.* Though the story is familiar, Hoig's journalistic style makes this new interpretation of events easy to read and well worth the time. Hoig utilizes the often-neglected reports from officers of the U.S. Army, Fourth Cavalry and testimonies from court martial cases related to the incident. In addition to his "new" sources, Hoig relies heavily on the papers from the Cheyenne-Arapaho Agency in the Indian Territory, a source Hoig argues is often overlooked.

The Cheyennes' encounters, that eventually resulted in their removal from their homelands, began in the 1870s. After failed attempts to negotiate the Americans out of their homeland along the Powder River, the Cheyennes joined with the Sioux in an attempt to force the issue. The result of the Indian alliance and the subsequent attacks on the Army became known as Red Cloud's War. The conflict was sprinkled with Indian victories, but in the end, the Army emerged victorious. Left with little, after suffering a terrible defeat at the Battle of Red Fork (1877), the Cheyennes began a process of surrendering that lasted through the spring of that year. With the Cheyennes' surrender, the government began plans to relocate them to Indian Territory. Though many Cheyennes ardently opposed removal, under the threat of force, they moved south on May 28, 1877.

The Cheyennes' time in Indian Territory was plagued by disease, lack of proper medical care, failure to get along with their southern brothers, lack of successful hunts, and most importantly, starvation. Faced with these pressures, the Cheyennes discussed returning to their homeland. By no means a united action, the Cheyennes left Indian Territory in September 1878 in a desperate flight northward. The Cheyennes fought their way across the Plains heading north from Indian Territory in hopes of reaching the Powder River country. Hoig argues throughout his day-by-day rendering of the Cheyennes' flight that the fighting was to stop the soldiers' advance and with trepidation the warriors killed the cavalrymen. Though the sentiment seems justified

and understandable, Hoig's evidence is not convincing. The Cheyennes routinely raided homesteads for food and arranged numerous ambushes for their pursuers.

Hoig's battle-by-battle account of the events offers a journalistic rendering of the movements of the Army. Numerous cavalry divisions were ordered out to return the Cheyennes. Throughout the spring and into the winter months, the Army searched the Plains for the Cheyennes, but were doomed to failure by an overabundance of contradictory orders. The Army's problem with orders is the focus of much of the work. The Cheyennes are front and center at the start of the work, but become relegated to a backdrop as Hoig examines each unit on the trail and the various orders that plagued those units. In this analysis, the Army becomes a group of "keystone cops" whose sheer ineptitude keeps them from capturing the Cheyennes. In spite of the contradictory nature of their search, the Army was able to capture one group of Cheyennes, led by Dull Knife.

Dull Knife's group was captured in Nebraska on the brink of starvation and unarmed. Taken to Fort Robinson under guard, the group was given food, clothing, and shelter. Just prior to Christmas 1878, the government sent orders to Fort Robinson to return the Cheyennes to Indian Territory. Dull Knife and his followers fled the fort in the middle of a snowstorm and were shot and captured, with few escaping. Other groups were luckier than Dull Knife's. A group under Little Wolf surrendered at the Northern Arapaho Agency where they were allowed to remain. Little Wolf's people would repay the Army for allowing them to remain in the homeland by serving as scouts against the Nez Perce and Sioux. Through the entire discussion of Dull Knife and Little Wolf, Hoig's focus remains on the military and the correspondence between officers in the field and their superiors in Washington, D.C.

The lack of Cheyenne survivors finally stalled the government's plan to establish them in Indian Territory. Many of the men had been killed in battle or died of starvation or disease en route. Finally, with little more than women and children alive, Sioux leader Red Cloud asked the military to offer the Cheyennes protection at his agency in Nebraska. The government relented and the Cheyennes were allowed to stay in their homeland. The larger issues of Hoig's work become obvious as the army turned on itself, passing blame from one unit to another. In Washington, the Cheyennes' flight reignited a battle between the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior as to who was better equipped to handle Indian issues.

The soldiers and officers blamed one another without regard to rank, position, or conduct. Eventually left to take the full weight of the blame was Captain Rendleback, who led the Fourth Cavalry. Rendleback was court-martialed, but in order to avoid a political catastrophe, General Philip Sheridan commuted the sentence and Rendleback received an honorable discharge. In his description of the events surrounding the court-martial, sentence, and final commutation, Hoig provides insight into the workings of a disgraced Army attempting to save itself from a full Congressional investigation into the Cheyennes' situation. The politicos satisfied, Sheridan and the Army were free to forget the Cheyenne incident had ever taken place. The Cheyennes were not accorded the same privilege. Their numbers decimated, they were left with little of the homeland they had once known, although they had emerged from the ordeal as the "victor."

Hoig's analysis of the failures of the Army and the dogged determination of the Cheyennes is a masterful reinterpretation by an award-winning author. However, in seeking to place blame for the tragedy that befell the Cheyennes, Hoig seems to leave objective analysis to his previous chapters. The author eventually blames the Army, the Indian Office, government policy, treaty violations, white buffalo hunters, and something vaguely referred to as "national character" for the Cheyennes' ordeal (pp. 223-236). In an effort to keep the blame as widely spread as possible, Hoig utilizes the Nuremberg Defense for the individual officers and soldiers. In placing the blame on terms and concepts, rather than on individuals or actual policy decisions, Hoig distracts from his stated purpose of contesting traditional views of the outbreak of the Cheyennes.

Hoig accomplishes his purpose with the acumen readers have come to expect from this acclaimed author. Scholars examining topics of Indian affairs, the military, the Cheyenne, and various other topics from homesteading to the environment would be well served by this work. The general reader would greatly benefit from Hoig's journalistic style and attention to detail. Despite the mentioned shortcomings, the work is well researched and written and provides an interesting insight into the flight of the Cheyennes.

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