

Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers: The 1857 Expedition and Battle of Solomon's Fork. By William Y. Chalfant. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989. 432 pages. \$26.95 cloth.

American western historians are fascinated with the conflicts between Native American nations and the United States military. Nothing captures the triumph of European "civilization" over Native American "savagery" better than armed conquest. This is especially true when those armed confrontations involve the Native American nations of the Great Plains. The image of painted mounted warriors resisting the onslaught of American civilization has long captivated the general reading public. Embodied in historical interpretations of the military struggles for the Great Plains are all the ill-conceived stereotypes that reify the mandate of Manifest Destiny against Indian people. For many, the military triumphs of the Great Plains affirm the conquest of "civilization" over "savagery," the "right of discovery" through subjugation, and the continued assault on Native American people. *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers*, written by William Y. Chalfant, adds another notch in "civilization's" six shooters. The book is a straightforward military history about the 1857 expedition and the subsequent battle at Solomon's Fork involving the U.S. Army and the Cheyenne. The work is a rich description of the events leading to the battle, but the author's narration embodies the well-worn thesis that Native Americans would always be defeated when confronted by the forces of American expansionism. The historical consequences of the conflict, especially for the Cheyenne, are obscured in relation to the historical sweep of United States-Native American relations.

Chalfant opens the book with a discussion of the social forces and historical events that would lead Colonel Edwin Sumner and his troops to invade Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho territory in 1857. Trappers, traders, and emigrants for decades invaded Cheyenne lands in increasing numbers. In an effort to protect commerce and the west-bound emigrants, the United States decided to construct a series of forts along the most frequented routes of travel. Faced with the deterioration of the lands and resources, in combination with the growing hegemony of the military in their territory, the Cheyenne saw their lifeways directly threatened.

In an attempt to limit the Cheyenne-emigrant confrontations along the trails, the federal government negotiated the 1851

Treaty of Fort Laramie. The treaty established a demarcated land base for the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho, encompassing western Kansas and eastern Colorado. The treaty also tried to limit intertribal warfare, as well as protect emigration and commerce over the Platte River and Santa Fe trails. Despite the treaty's intentions, sociohistorical events made a lasting peace impossible. It became increasingly clear to the Cheyenne that the military was stationed in their lands to inflict punishment on them rather than to protect their territorial rights and interests. Conflicts with the emigrants and the military became more frequent. After the 1856 conflict at the Upper Platte bridge and the series of raids along the emigrant trails, Secretary of War John B. Floyd ordered the army to conduct operations against the Cheyenne "to punish past offenses against the United States" (p. 63). Colonel Sumner was dispatched with cavalry, dragoons, infantry, and artillery units to subdue the "unruly race" (p. 33).

The bulk of the book, chapters 4 through 10, detail Sumner's military strategy and his march to meet the Cheyenne. At Fort Leavenworth, Colonel Sumner divided his forces. Major John Sedgwick led a column over the Santa Fe Trail westward, then northward to the South Platte River. Sumner's command proceeded north and then west along the Platte River Road to Fort Laramie and then south to rendezvous with Sedgwick's column. The united command penetrated into the heart of Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho territory. Guided by Pawnee and Delaware scouts, the column moved southeastward for about a week before locating the Cheyenne villages. The troop movements did not go unnoticed by Cheyenne scouts, who maintained a constant vigil over the column's progress.

Chapters 11 and 12 reconstruct Cheyenne military tactics and the battle itself. Cheyenne leaders moved their villages to Solomon's Fork to ensure their safety. The Cheyenne chose the battle site based on the medicines of Ice and Dark, which would enhance the accuracy of Cheyenne weaponry and protect Cheyenne warriors from the soldiers' bullets.

On 7 July 1857, approximately 350 Cheyenne faced about the same number of Sumner's cavalry on the south fork of the Solomon River. Fall Leaf, one of the Delaware scouts, fired the first shot. As the opposing ranks drew closer, Colonel Sumner ordered a sabre charge; it is the only sabre charge in the annals of U.S. cavalry-Native American conflict. The Cheyenne broke

off their charge after firing a few shots and began to scatter in small groups across the Plains. According to Cheyenne recorded tradition, their retreat was partially prompted by the medicines of Ice and Dark, which protected them from bullets but not sabres. The military action became a running battle, with cavalymen pursuing at-will individual groups of Cheyenne warriors. In the end, the Cheyenne suffered four casualties, one was captured, and some were wounded. The U.S. cavalry lost eleven men. For Colonel Sumner, the battle was not the momentous victory that he had envisioned.

Not wholly satisfied with his military results, Sumner pursued the Cheyenne across the central Plains. His command spent three months in the field. Sumner's action did not result in any direct confrontations with the Cheyenne, but his troops did manage to destroy an abandoned Cheyenne village that was fully provisioned and to capture two more Cheyenne.

The final section of the work, appropriately titled "The Finale," describes Sumner's actions before marching back to Fort Leavenworth. If his troops could not meet the Cheyenne in a direct battle, Sumner decided to inflict punishment by denying them their annuities and provisions guaranteed by treaty. On the Arkansas River, on 19 August 1857 Colonel Sumner issued an order to turn over all the Cheyenne annuities to his command and destroy all ammunition. Indian agent Miller complied with Sumner's demands by turning over all annuity provisions to the quartermaster and throwing all powder, flint, and lead into the Arkansas River. If he could not confront the Cheyenne directly, he would cause them some hardship during the impending winter. As the summer ended, Sumner's men marched back to Fort Leavenworth, ending that season's military action.

Chalfant concludes the work with a discussion of the meaning of the expedition and battle as "a moment in history" (p. 295). It is in these final pages that the motivations behind writing the work become clear. In the annals of Native American-United States warfare for the Great Plains, the 1857 battle of Solomon's Fork was minor both in outcome and implications for the U.S. military and the Cheyenne. What makes the battle a monumental event for western historians is the famous sabre charge. This was a symbolic victory that pitted Euro-American "civilization" against Native American "savagery." In that regard, the author himself writes,

That moment, however, was a microcosm of relations between white civilization and the Plains Indians—the best and worst of both worlds. It saw the end of one era in relations with the Indians of the Plains and the beginning of another. It saw a change in the methods of warfare. Never again would a large cavalry in unity charge an Indian foe with sabres; never again would Indians believe they could hold white soldiers at bay without paying a price in blood and sacrifice (p. 295–96).

In Chalfant's view, it is futile therefore for the Cheyenne or any other Native American nation to challenge and resist the military power and genius of the United States. Throughout the work, the themes of U.S. superiority, conquest and determination are juxtaposed against Cheyenne inferiority, futility, and superstition. Details about the expedition, Sumner's military prowess, and the fortitude of his troops during the expedition overflow from Chalfant's history. As for the Cheyenne, new knowledge about their motivations and actions appear to be minimal. Cheyenne traditions are placed in an appendix, so the reader must search there for the cultural basis for Cheyenne military organization and motivations. The Cheyenne are relegated to the status of pawns, reacting to the overwhelming forces of civilization.

As a military history, *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers* is thoroughly documented and meticulously researched, especially surrounding the U.S. military tactics and movements. The work, though, is not a balanced treatment with regard to Cheyenne motivations and actions. The Cheyenne appear and disappear on the historical stage just long enough to illuminate Sumner's military strategies and tactics. After all, as Chalfant reiterates, the importance of the event is "when they [the cavalry] charged with sabres across the valley of the Solomon and into the pages of history"—pages almost wiped clean of Native Americans (p. 286). In the final analysis, *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers* is a disappointing effort. The work is unbalanced and devoid of any new information about the Cheyenne; it also reifies a common theme in American western history: the conquest of "civilization" over "savagery."

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