

Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War

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THE ANNALS OF IOWA

American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict, by Henry Warner Bowden. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. pp. 255. Notes, index. \$14.95.

Bowden's book is an ambitious attempt to cover, albeit in a general manner, the complex history of the relationship between American Indians and Christian missions and missionaries, from Spanish colonial times to the present. This Indian-white relationship, regardless of what level it occurred on—religious, political, economic, or whatever—is invariably a bewildering, confusing mishmash of factors which are maddeningly difficult to grasp. Despite the complexity and scope of his work, Bowden has done a commendable job of synthesizing a large amount of secondary literature to provide a broad perspective of this subject.

But like every overview book of this sort, Bowden's work does have its share of problems. Its very scope is perhaps *too* broad to be adequately handled in a book of this length. His almost exclusive reliance upon secondary sources, while allowing a variety of points-of-view, does not allow more than cursory attention to be paid to even the most important aspects of Indians and missions. And in fact, when information is culled from a wide variety of secondary sources without any supporting documentation from primary ones, errors result. For example, his statements (pp. 174-175) about the supposed educational achievements of Indian students (mainly Cherokees) at the Brainerd and Eliot schools operated under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, are way off the mark. In fact, these two schools, which operated roughly during the period from 1817 to 1840, were nearly complete failures educationally. Students actually learned very little at all, a point Bowden misses completely.

If read for general content and background, this book does have value. But as with any general work, one should not place too much stock in the validity of specific points made in it.

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Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War, by Jerome A. Greene. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. pp. xvi, 192. Photographs, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$12.95.

Military history buffs and professional historians alike will find this a useful book. The battle at Slim Buttes in South Dakota has been over-

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shadowed by the dramatic defeat of Custer earlier in the summer of 1876 and by the final defeat of the Sioux the next year.

In the summer of 1876 the federal government had two substantial armies in the northern plains under the command of General Alfred Terry and General George Crook. By August neither army could boast success in defeating the Sioux. Indeed, Crook had been badly mauled by the Sioux on Rosebud Creek in early June while Custer had left Terry's command on his advance toward the Little Big Horn. Crook brought his army north to the Yellowstone in late July in pursuit of the scattering tribesmen. He left the Yellowstone late in August intent on finding the Sioux in Dakota Territory and bringing them to battle. Eventually, Crook headed his troops south toward the Black Hills. After Crook's army had been on the trail for two weeks his troops were on less than half rations and were reduced to shooting horses for food. During what became known as the "starvation march" Crook sent Captain Anson Mills ahead to acquire rations from settlements near the Black Hills. On the way Mills encountered the Sioux leader American Horse's encampment at Slim Buttes. Mills decided to attack the village and requested Crook's assistance.

The battle began with a dawn charge that captured the village and soon settled into a siege of those Indians who could not escape. Skirmishing continued throughout that day and the next. Crook's main units arrived later, burned the village, and captured several Indians including American Horse who died of his wounds before the battle ended. Crook's troops sustained few casualties.

Historians have not accorded the battle at Slim Buttes any great importance. It was generally viewed as a relatively minor event in the course of the Sioux War. Jerome Greene, however, makes a persuasive case that the battle had significance beyond numbers killed or captured. Crook's march to the Black Hills employed methods later used by Colonel Nelson Miles against the Sioux, while Captain Mills's strategy provided a model for how to attack Indian encampments. More important, Greene argues, Slim Buttes provided a demoralized Army, carrying the memories of the Rosebud and Custer's defeat, with a much needed victory. Slim Buttes encouraged the Army to continue its relentless pressure on the Sioux that led to their capitulation the next spring.

Greene has written a clear and absorbing account of Crook's march and the battle. A number of appendixes provide those interested with official accounts of the battle and references to site locations, and lists of officers and units engaged in the battle.

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