

*Military-Indian Conflict:
A Survey of the Historical Literature*

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, distrust, misunderstandings, broken promises, and violence frequently stained relations between the United States and American Indians. The United States Army was involved in more than fifteen hundred battles and skirmishes against Indians through the end of the nineteenth century. The Army acknowledged that over four thousand regular soldiers were killed, wounded, or missing in these actions, with Indian losses probably somewhat higher. Thousands of additional casualties came in the untold numbers of engagements between American Indians and civilian volunteers or state-authorized military units. Although sometimes referred to as “limited” wars, such a term could hardly be more misleading, as all sides commonly targeted women, children, and the aged in the course of these clashes.

Modern scholars of military-Indian conflicts face several challenges. Relying heavily on the written word for their evidence, traditional historians have found the warehouses of records collected and maintained by the federal government to be an especially fertile field for research. After all, the United States Army documented just about everything it did, especially if it involved any expenditures of public funds. But tracking down materials on state, local, and informal military groups can be frustrating, leading to a predictable emphasis on the federal perspective. Likewise, efforts to fully represent all American Indian viewpoints remain incomplete. Cultural traditions, structures of authority, and military practices differed widely from tribe to tribe. To complement the scattered written records documenting Indian perspectives, some

scholars have incorporated the lessons of anthropology, archaeology, and ethnology. To date, however, relatively few writers using such approaches have focused their efforts on military themes.

Military history has, however, undergone profound changes. Traditionally, military historians have focused on events from the “top down.” Closely scrutinizing troop movements and campaign plans, they have emphasized the deeds and decisions of leaders, or the “great captains.” More recently, students of the military experience have taken pains to more effectively place these events within broader cultural, economic, and social contexts. They now realize, for example, that activities commonly associated with nation-building, rather than direct military conquest, consumed the bulk of the regular army’s energy and resources through the end of the nineteenth century. Similarly, while scholars have long understood the important role of military affairs among many tribal cultures, only recently have they grasped the central connections between the tribes’ economies and their abilities to wage war. Simply put, many American Indian economies could not mobilize the logistical capacity to support long wars, with devastating results to the tribes.

General Reference Works

The best single-volume survey of military-Indian conflict remains Robert M. Utley and Wilcomb E. Washburn, *American Heritage History of the Indian Wars* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002). Charles M. Robinson III’s *The Plains Wars, 1757-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2003), adopts a more international perspective, noting that Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, and the Confederate States of America joined the

United States and American Indians in the many-sided struggle for supremacy over the western plains. Though neither focuses exclusively on military affairs, R. Douglas Hurt, *The Indian Frontier, 1763-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), and Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984) offer balanced introductions to United States-Indian relations. For a general overview of American Indian experiences, Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *500 Nations: An Illustrated History of North American Indians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), a beautifully illustrated and well-conceived work in its own right, served as the companion volume to a television documentary of the same name. In adopting a more combative approach, Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2005), blistering indictment of Indian policies implemented by Anglos in Texas illustrates the relentless brutality that often characterized frontier warfare.

Three surveys of military-Indian conflicts are strongly recommended. More recent books have added nuance and detail, but none have challenged the basic foundations laid by these exemplary studies. Covering the years before the U. S. acquisition of Texas, the Southwest, California, and Oregon, Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (New York: Macmillan, 1969) places military-Indian conflicts within the more general context of the period. Robert M. Utley's two surveys, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), and *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), feature the author's graceful writing style, command of the literature, and insightful analysis. In

essence, both Prucha and Utley suggest that the army was neither hero nor villain, but rather a reflection of the nation and government it represented.

The Army and the Wars against Indians

Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Americans doubted the need for a large standing army, which they believed threatened liberty and unnecessarily burdened taxpayers. The United States Army thus remained small: less than four thousand officers and men in 1794; just over seven thousand in 1834; about twenty-eight thousand in 1874. The best single study of the army throughout this period is Edward M. Coffman's authoritative *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Coffman describes military customs, laws, and regulations as well as the backgrounds and daily lives of the officers, enlisted men, and dependents comprising the "old army." Don Rickey, Jr., *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), remains a highly readable narrative of post-Civil War conditions. Robert Wooster, *Soldiers, Sutlers, and Settlers: Garrison Life on the Texas Frontier* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), focuses specifically on army activities in Texas. Patricia Stallard's *Glittering Misery: Dependents of the Indian-Fighting Army* (1978; rpt. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992) offers the best survey of the women and children who lived in western military communities. Officers' wives also gain a greater voice in Sherry L. Smith, *The View from Officers' Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990). Smith is especially sensitive to the ambivalent attitudes of many

military men and women, whose opinions of American Indians ranged from heartless to humanitarian.

At least 180,000 African-Americans fought in the Union Army during the Civil War, and Congress reserved four regiments in the post-bellum army for black enlisted personnel. Charles L. Kenner, *Buffalo Soldiers and Officers of the Ninth Cavalry, 1867-1898: Black and White Together* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), offers a thoroughly researched narrative of the most famous of these units. William A. Dobak and Thomas D. Phillips add the Tenth Cavalry and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry regiments to their study, *The Black Regulars, 1866-1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001). Though acknowledging the presence of personal racism, Dobak and Phillips challenge allegations of more systematic, institutionalized discrimination. The shabby uniforms, inadequate equipment and arms, and poor food allotted black troops were no better or worse than those given white soldiers, argue the authors, and simply reflect the lack of public sympathy for the standing army as a whole. They also demonstrate that use of the term “buffalo soldier”—now an accepted label for black troops in the nineteenth century—came well after their original terms of service. In his *The Buffalo Soldier Tragedy of 1877* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), Paul H. Carlson offers a gripping narrative of the experiences of a company of African American soldiers that ran out of water in a tortuous summer expedition across the Texas Panhandle. James N. Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldiers Along the Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), demonstrates that prejudice spanned all racial boundaries, and was hardly limited to whites vs. non-whites. Frank N. Schubert, author of several more focused accounts of African-American

soldiers, has compiled an excellent set of primary sources in *Voices of the Buffalo Soldier: Records, Reports, and Recollections of Military Life and Service in the West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

Other historians have examined the impact of the wars against the Indians upon U. S. military policy. Russell F. Weigley, “The Long Death of the Indian-Fighting Army,” in *Soldiers and Civilians: The U. S. Army and the American People*, ed. Gerry P. Ryan and Timothy K. Nenner (Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, 1987): 27-39, argues that the twentieth-century army’s emphasis on mobility, rather than power, stemmed in large part from its wars against the Indians. In another important study, John M. Gates, “Indians and Insurrectos: The U. S. Army’s Experience with Insurgency,” *Parameters* 13 (March 1983): 59-68, points out that the army—whether it recognizes it or not—has long been in the business of counterinsurgency. Building upon these themes, Brian Linn, *The U. S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), emphasizes the many links, in personnel as well as methods, between the Indian-fighting army and the military force that occupied the Philippines.

Historians have also debated whether or not the contemporary army had any Indian-fighting policy. During the 1790s, Anthony Wayne’s “legion” was organized specifically to defeat Indians who dominated the Ohio River valley, but regulars more typically planned for wars against conventional rivals. Most writers have suggested that the army eventually adopted elements of what is now known as “total warfare”—especially as practiced during the Civil War—to fight Indians. Andrew J. Birtle, *U. S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941*

(Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2001), finds numerous examples where officers wrote about irregular warfare in professional journals. In a revisionist work, however, Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), contends that a divided regular army, pushed and pulled by multiple demands and expectations and content to prepare itself for a more conventional enemy, never developed any strategic doctrine for its wars against Indians.

Many historians have emphasized the army's importance in nation-building activities throughout the West. Pioneering this subfield was Francis Paul Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet: The Role of the United States Army in the Development of the Northwest, 1815-1860* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1953). Michael L. Tate, *The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), explores the army's role in improving infrastructure and establishing order, as well as promoting scientific, cultural, and humanitarian activities. Thomas T. Smith, *The U. S. Army and the Texas Frontier Economy, 1845-1900* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), remains the most ambitious analysis of the army's regional economic impact. Smith demonstrates that army quartermasters, paymasters, engineers, commissary officers, contractors, and agents disbursed over \$70 million in Texas from 1849-1900, double the total value of property in the Lone Star state when it had joined the Union. During the 1870s, army spending alone accounted for 20 percent of the increase in property values in Texas. For other good economic studies, see Robert W. Frazer, *Forts and Supplies: The Role of the Army in the Economy of the Southwest, 1846-1861* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), and

Darlis A. Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers: Military Supply in the Southwest, 1861-1885* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

Biographies remain a popular source for readers interested in military-Indian conflicts. Paul D. Nelson, *Anthony Wayne: Soldier of the Early Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Carl P. Schlicke, *General George Wright: Guardian of the Pacific Coast* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); and George Rollie Adams, *General William S. Harney* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), focus on three of the army's most influential commanders in the wars against Indians before 1860. Post-Civil War army leaders have received even more scrutiny. John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* (New York: Free Press, 1993); and Paul Andrew Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), are superior studies of William Sherman and Phil Sheridan, who served as the army's commanding generals from 1869-1883 and 1883-1888, respectively. Both authors offer objective, though sympathetic, analyses of their subjects. Entire bookshelves are needed to house works about George A. Custer, but Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), is easily the best. Utley portrays Custer as an overly ambitious but talented officer whose precipitous attack at the Little Bighorn sought to duplicate earlier successes, using similar tactics, at the Battle of the Washita. As Utley points out, "the army lost largely because the Indians won" (p. 194). Paul Andrew Hutton, ed., *The Custer Reader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), is a well-conceived collection of primary and secondary materials. Charles M. Robinson, III, *General Crook and the Western Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,

2001); Michael D. Pierce, *The Most Promising Young Officer: A Life of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); and Robert Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), trace the lives of the army's three most relentlessly effective campaigners. Shirley A. Leckie, *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); William H. Leckie and Shirley A. Leckie, *Unlikely Warriors: General Benjamin H. Grierson and His Family* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984); and Robert H. Steinbach, *A Long March: The Lives of Frank and Alice Baldwin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), emphasize the roles of wives in fostering and supporting the careers of their officer-husbands. Paul Andrew Hutton, ed., *Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), includes shorter essays on several previously-mentioned figures, as well as William Clark, Stephen H. Long, James H. Carleton, John G. Bourke, and William B. Hazen.

State militias and volunteer units sometimes supplemented the regulars, but have been the subjects of less analysis. Mary Ellen Rowe, *Bulwark of the Republic: The American Militia in Antebellum West* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), which emphasizes the social and political functions of the militia before the Civil War, serves as a useful counterweight to the emphasis on the regulars. The most famous of the non-regular army units, the Texas Rangers, have alternately been hailed by champions and vilified by critics. Recently, however, Robert M. Utley, *Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), has provided a more balanced account which neither glorifies nor demonizes the Rangers. Thomas W. Cutrer, *Ben McCulloch and the Frontier Military Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of

North Carolina, 1993), makes a strong case for the talents of this charismatic amateur. Also emphasizing the effectiveness of non-regular units, David Paul Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas' Rangers and Rebels* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), contends that in the wake of the regular army's withdrawal from Texas during the Civil War, volunteer units did reasonably well in protecting against Indian attacks. Thomas G. Mitchell, *Indian Fighters Turned American Politicians: From Military Service to Public Office* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), points out how men like William Henry Harrison, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and even Abraham Lincoln often exploited their volunteer and militia experience fighting Indians to further their political careers, especially during the early Republic period.

American Indian Military Resistance

Although numerous scholars have studied American Indians, few have focused specifically on military affairs. Gregory Evans Dowd's provocative *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), for instance, traces the complex efforts among Delawares, Shawnees, Cherokees, and Creeks to form a unified front against Anglo-American invaders. Ritual and religion, insists Dowd, constituted the foundation for these early pan-Indian movements. Likewise, Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), highlights the struggle for supremacy between French, British, American, Iroquoian, and Algonquin contestants, concluding that the temporary balance of power produced a cultural "middle ground." But in the process of

developing this brilliant and original thesis, White devotes no more attention to military matters than Dowd.

Frank Raymond Secoy's *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains* (1953; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) remains an important pioneering study on the impact of guns and horses on the precarious balance of military power in the West. Donald J. Berthrong, *The Southern Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964); and Paul H. Carlson, *The Plains Indians* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), all offer close attention to warfare's importance in tribal cultures. Stan Hoig, *Tribal Wars of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), boasts a good discussion of Indian combat tactics. Greater use of archaeological and forensic evidence promises to uncover more Indian perspectives, enabling Karl W. Laumbach, *Hembrillo: An Apache Battlefield of the Victorio War* (Las Cruces, N. Mex.: Human Systems Research, 2000), to provide an unusually detailed tactical analysis of a single battle. Thomas W. Dunlay's *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the United States Army 1860-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), remains the standard narrative of the Indian auxiliaries and scouts who fought beside the army. Jerome A. Greene, ed., *Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great Sioux War, 1876-1877* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), provides a superior collection of Indian source materials.

Biographies of important Indian military leaders are much more common. John Sugden, *Blue Jacket: Warrior of the Shawnees* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), notes that his subject was more willing than most to adapt certain features

of white culture. Sugden's *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997) studies the magnetic Shawnee leader who attempted to form an Indian confederation to block United States expansion. On the other hand, R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), argues that Tecumseh's brother, the prophet Tenskwatawa, was more important in leading resistance to the Americans before 1810. Roger L. Nichols, *Black Hawk and the Warrior's Path* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1992), portrays the man who led a futile rebellion against white expansion in the early 1830s as a proud, patriotic, tradition-bound leader who found it difficult to work with others (be they Indian or white). For a realistic portrayal of the most famous of the Hunkpapas, see Robert M. Utley's *The Lance and the Shield: A Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993). Providing a balanced account of the most influential Lakota chieftain of the period is Robert W. Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), who depicts his subject as alternately heroic, wise, and ruthless in his efforts to defend his culture against white encroachment. Like Larson's work, David Roberts, *Once They Moved Like the Wind: Cochise, Geronimo, and the Apache Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), is written for general readers. In addition to Cochise and Geronimo, Roberts also scrutinizes influential war leaders like Lozen, Naiche, Mangas Coloradas, and Juh, doing so in a manner that is sympathetic to Chiricahua perspectives without becoming overly romantic. Richard B. Etulain and Glenda Riley, eds., *Chiefs and Generals: Nine Men Who Shaped the American West* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Press, 2004), features essays on Red Cloud, Victorio, Chief Joseph, Geronimo, Oliver O. Howard, Crook, Custer, Mackenzie, and Miles.

The Indian Wars of a New Nation

Two recent examinations of colonial and early Republic period warfare stress distinctly different themes. Emphasizing the basic continuities in European-Indian conflict, Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), highlights the Indians' tactical superiority. The United States and most European powers, conclude Starkey, relied upon conventional styles of warmaking rather than adapting frontier methods; as a result, they weren't very good at the latter. By contrast, John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), argues that frontier experiences inspired Americans to develop a "way of war" which systematically directed violence against noncombatants through irregular means. In so doing, Grenier places frontier warfare squarely within the American military tradition.

Contrary to popular belief, the greatest Indian victories against the United States did not occur along the Little Bighorn in 1876. Rather, they came in the Old Northwest, when coalitions of Miamis, Shawnees, Kickapoos, Potawatomis, Ottawas, and others mauled government columns led by Josiah Harmar (1790) and Arthur St. Clair (1791). Only in 1794, following the Battle of Fallen Timbers, did Anthony Wayne break the military power of these groups and open the region to non-Indian occupation. Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); and Alan D. Gaff, *Bayonets in the Wilderness: Anthony Wayne's Legion in the Old Northwest* (Norman: University of

Oklahoma Press, 2004), offer the best accounts of these conflicts. The War of 1812 was in many ways largely a clash between the United States and Indians, as explained by Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

Although the withdrawal of British military support for the tribes in the Old Northwest following the War of 1812 significantly weakened Indian resistance to U. S. expansion, violent collisions nonetheless continued. John Missall and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004) is the most recent history of the three wars (1817-18, 1835-42, and 1856-58) against Seminole Indians. It should be supplemented with Frank Laumer, *Dade's Last Command* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), a graceful account of the annihilation of Maj. Francis Dade and two companies of regulars by the Seminoles in December 1835. Durwood Ball, *Army Regulars on the Western Frontier, 1848-1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), adroitly places western military affairs within a larger context of territorial expansion and sectional bitterness. Books by William Y. Chalfant, *Cheyennes and Horse Soldiers: The 1857 Expedition and the Battle of Solomon's Fork* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), and *Without Quarter: The Wichita Expedition and the Fight on Crooked Creek* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), address the early clashes on the southern Plains, as does James R. Arnold, *Jeff Davis's Own: Cavalry, Comanches and the Battle for the Texas Frontier* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000). R. Eli Paul, *Blue Water Creek and the First Sioux War 1854-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), offers a compelling narrative of the first of several wars between the Lakotas and the United

States. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Knopf, 1991), describes the conflicts between the United States, the Confederacy, and several Indian tribes during the nation's bloodiest war.

Conquest of a Continent

Following the Civil War, Indian military resistance collapsed in the wake of relentless non-Indian expansion, railroad construction, the mass slaughter of the buffalo, and continued army pressure. Jerome A. Greene, *Washita: The U. S. Army and the Southern Cheyennes, 1867-1869* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), offers a balanced account of the battle which established Lt. Col. George A. Custer's reputation as an Indian fighter. Although sometimes using unfortunately disparaging terms to describe American Indians, the most accessible history of the Red River campaign is James L. Haley, *The Buffalo War: The History of the Red River Indian Uprising of 1874* (1976; rpt. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985). Among numerous studies of Nez Perce-United States relations, Bruce Hampton, *Children of Grace: The Nez Perce War of 1877* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994); and Jerome A. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer, 1877: The U. S. Army and the Nee-Me-Poo Crisis* (Missoula: Montana Historical Society Press, 2000), focus most directly on military affairs, with Greene's being the more exhaustive. For army-Indian conflicts in the Southwest, see Dan L. Thrapp, *The Conquest of Apacheria* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967); and Charles Collins, *Apache Nightmare: The Battle at Cibecue Creek* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

Conflicts between the army and the Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes following the Civil War, featuring Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn, have generated keen interest. John S. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign: Mitch Boyer and the Little Bighorn Reconstructed* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) combines the sensitive use of the testimony of Indian scouts (often dismissed by previous scholars) with a detailed time-motion analysis to meticulously trace Custer's last movements. A long-time analyst with the Department of Defense, Larry Sklenar, *To Hell with Honor: Custer and the Little Bighorn* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), mounts a serious and sober counter to those who have criticized Custer's conduct at the Little Bighorn. Defending Custer's tactics, Sklenar instead faults Marcus Reno for failing to come to the aid of his superior officer. Students of the battle received an unanticipated benefit from a 1983 grassfire, which laid open the field to a series of archaeological digs. The newly uncovered artifacts are best analyzed in Richard A. Fox, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle: The Little Big Horn Reconsidered* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), which refutes claims that Custer's men conducted anything like a "last stand" atop Custer Hill. Taking an entirely different approach, Sherry L. Smith's *Sagebrush Soldier: Private William Earl Smith's View of the Sioux War of 1876* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), interweaves a private's diary with assorted other Indian and army accounts in a brilliant example of what some have dubbed "little history." Jerome A. Greene's account of Mackenzie's destruction of the village of Chiefs Dull Knife and Little Wolf, *Morning Star Dawn: The Powder River Expedition and the Northern Cheyennes, 1876* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), reflects the author's mastery of Indian and army sources. Robert M. Utley's *The Last*

Days of the Sioux Nation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) is a convincing explanation of the events leading to the Wounded Knee disaster of 1890-91. For the role of individual military posts in these conflicts, see especially Paul Hedren, *Fort Laramie in 1876: Chronicle of a Frontier Post at War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); and Thomas R. Buecker, *Fort Robinson and the American West, 1874-1899* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1999).

Resources for Further Study

Many, but not all, of the physical sites of the military-Indian conflicts have been preserved in some form or fashion. For those interested in visiting these battlefields, John D. McDermott, *A Guide to the Indian Wars of the West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); and Robert G. Ferris, ed., *Soldier and Brave: Historic Places Associated with Indian Affairs and the Indian Wars in the Trans-Mississippi West*, The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, Volume XII (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, 1971), are recommended.

Joseph G. Dawson, III, *The Late 19th Century U. S. Army, 1865-1898: A Research Guide* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), is an invaluable overview for prospective researchers. Encyclopedias and reference guides provide useful background information, with William B. Kessel and Robert Wooster, eds., *Encyclopedia of Native American Wars and Warfare* (New York: Facts on File, 2005); Carl Waldman, *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes* (New York: Facts on File, 1988); and Carl Waldman, *Atlas of the North American Indian*, rev. ed. (Checkmark Books, 2000), especially applicable to this topic. Short essays by R. David Edmunds and Robert

Wooster in *The Atlas of American Military History*, ed. James C. Bradford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 42-49, 94-99, are accompanied by helpful maps. For brief histories of individual posts, see Robert B. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Historic Forts: The Military, Pioneer, and Trading Posts of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), and Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West: Military Forts and Presidios and Posts Commonly Called Forts West of the Mississippi River to 1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).

Several aspects of military-Indian conflicts offer attractive subjects for future scholarship. A systematic study of American Indian tactics is very badly needed. And although important early groundwork has been laid, scholars have only begun to recognize the importance—and the frequency—of the public and private efforts of wives on behalf of their officer husbands. Similarly, surprisingly little effort has been made to assess the American military frontiers from an international perspective. In an important exception, James O. Gump, *The Dust Rose Like Smoke: The Subjugation of the Zulu and the Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), shows how the Zulu and the Sioux were able to win major combat victories at Isandhlwana and the Little Bighorn, only to soon collapse against the weight of their larger and richer enemies.

Historians have traditionally approached the military-Indian conflicts anecdotally, rather than systematically. Innovative recent research by Thomas T. Smith, though admittedly based upon federal rather than state or Indian records, has solidified our understanding of the nature of this warfare. In *The Old Army in Texas: A Research Guide to the U. S. Army in Nineteenth-Century Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000), Smith assesses the 219 Indian vs. army combat engagements in

Texas between 1849 and 1881, fights which comprised about one-fifth of all Indian-army fights in the United States during that period. Smith's research confirms the incredibly fluid and unpredictable nature of combat on the Plains. Seventy percent of these battles in Texas were hasty attacks—meeting engagements or strikes against camps or villages in which army attackers sacrificed coordination in favor of speed and surprise. In only 2 percent of these engagements did the army mount a deliberate attack, featuring detailed planning and coordination. American Indians initiated combat in the remaining 28% of battles. Twenty or fewer Indians participated in nearly half of all fights; similarly, the army engaged in company-sized strength or less (in the field, companies typically numbered between 35-70 men) nearly three-fourths of the time. Of course, conditions in western Texas differed from those in the Florida Everglades, the heavily-wooded Northwest, or the lava beds of southern Oregon, but Smith's innovative methods have reaffirmed the value of continually reexamining this important and controversial chapter in American history.

Robert Wooster is Professor of History at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, where he has won several teaching awards. He has written or edited eight books, most recently *Frontier Crossroads: Fort Davis and the West* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006).