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1-1-2009

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Give Me Eighty Men: Women and the Myth of the Fetterman Fight. By Shannon D. Smith. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xxii + 236 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. $39.95

Known as the Battle of a Hundred Slain to the Lakota and the Fetterman Massacre to most other Americans, the 1866 battle has been as mythic as the Battle of the Little Big Horn that followed it by a decade. The story is a simple one: Captain William Judd Fetterman viewed his superior, Colonel Henry B. Carrington, as a overcautious coward in dealing with Indian affairs. Seeing an opportunity to defeat a large group of Lakota warriors in northern Wyoming territory, Fetterman disobeyed his orders and attacked what he thought was a small party of Lakotas in the Peno Valley. There were, in fact, more than a thousand warriors in the valley, and this brash move cost Fetterman his life, along with the lives of all eighty-one of the men under his command.

So the story has stood for 140 years—until this book, in which Shannon D. Smith sets the record straight by looking at the powerful role that women, especially commanders' wives, played in shaping their historical legacy. In *Give Me Eighty Men*, Smith thoroughly rehabilitates William Judd Fetterman's reputation, revealing him to be a committed army officer with a solid Civil War background who sought to support a contingent of Army cavalry as

they charged into a Sioux trap. The heart of this story, however, is not about Fetterman, but about Carrington's first and second wives, and ultimately about the critical role that women and their writings played in creating truth and legend in the post-Civil War West.

The Battle of a Hundred Slain was the Army's worst (and at that time, only) defeat at the hands of their Indian adversaries, and Army officials, including Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman, found Carrington—a political appointee with no battlefield experience—an easy scapegoat. What neither Grant nor Sherman took into account, however, were the tenacity of Carrington's successive wives and the power of their pens. Even while her husband was being interrogated at Fort McPherson, Margaret Carrington began to write in his defence and about the Indian people in whose midst she lived. Published in 1868, Margaret Carrington's *Absaraka, Home of the Crows* told a very different story about the battle, making Fetterman into a brash, egotistical, and self-serving officer who consciously disobeyed her husband's direct orders not to follow the Lakota into the Peno Valley. Thus was born the myth of the Fetterman Massacre. Until she died in 1870, Margaret wrote letters and articles proclaiming her husband's correctness and Fetterman's responsibility for the "massacre." Carrington's second wife, Frances Grummond, carried on her predecessor's work, and by 1875 the American public and many Army officials believed Fetterman solely responsible for the Army defeat. Even Grant came over to Carrington's side.

Thoroughly researched and very well written, Shannon D. Smith's book joins the works of other recent writers, such as Sherry L. Smith, who have found in the writings of officers' wives not only important chronicles of the post-Civil War West, but testimony to the growing importance of women in the American public sphere.

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