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Review of *Myth, Memory, and Massacre: The Pease River Capture of Cynthia Ann Parker* by Paul H. Carlson and Tom Crum

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The so-called “Battle of Pease River,” in which the Comanche Indians purportedly suffered a crucial defeat, has become a recurrent topic in the literature on the Indian wars of the Southern Plains, as well as in the collective memory of Anglo-Texans. In this extraordinary book, Carlson and Crum scrutinize numerous accounts of the event to unveil one of the most blatant fabrications in the history of Texas. The authors’ painstaking meticulousness has permitted them to discriminate numerous falsehoods and forgeries from the following few discernable facts: a massacre occurred on the banks of Mule Creek, a tributary of the Pease River, in today’s Foard County, Texas, on December 19, 1860, when a force of twenty Texas Rangers led by Lawrence Sullivan (Sul) Ross and twenty federal troops attacked a small Comanche camp of some nine tents, killing about twelve Comanches, mostly women and children, and taking three prisoners, including white captive Cynthia Ann Parker. Seized by Comanches during the famous 1835 raid on Fort Parker, by 1860 Cynthia Ann had become a full-fledged Comanche, the mother of three children, including the renowned Quanah, who would years later become an influential reservation leader.

The “outstanding” participation of various individuals allegedly involved in the action, the “redemption” (even if unwilling) of Cynthia Ann, and the “decisive” nature of the Comanche defeat became the cornerstones of a legend increasingly embellished through a succession of largely self-serving and spurious testimonies. The myth thus created served to “corroborate” the presumed superiority of the white race, and to promote the political career of Sul Ross, who would eventually become Texas governor and president of Texas A&M University. Over his life, Ross himself gave
five different versions of the attack, including one reproduced in James T. DeShields's book *Cynthia Ann Parker* (1886), which became the “authorized account.” Ranger Benjamin F. Gholson, one of the most cited “witnesses,” produced two testimonies, the earliest one in 1928, sixty-seven years after the massacre, at age eighty-five. Even worse, there is no evidence that Gholson was involved in the event. Charles Goodnight, who participated in the expedition but was not present at the fight, claimed that the Rangers killed only warriors, and attributed a number of key actions to Ross or to himself. More credibly, Ranger Hiram B. Rogers, a true participant in the assault, summarized the incident in this laconic statement: “I was in the Pease River fight, but I am not very proud of it. That was not a battle at all, but just a killing of squaws.” Further research would be desirable to reveal Comanche traditions, myths, and memories concerning the Mule Creek Massacre and its historical context.

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