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Review of *Following the Indian Wars: The Story of the Newspaper Correspondents among the Indian Campaigners* By Oliver Knight

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Following the Indian Wars: The Story of the Newspaper Correspondents among the Indian Campaigners. By Oliver Knight. Foreword by Sherry L. Smith. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993; reprint of 1960 ed. Foreword, preface, maps, black and white photographs, bibliography, index. xix + 348 pp. \$17.95 paper.

Since newspaper correspondents take a backseat to Indian campaigners, this volume would have been better served by a different subtitle. Oliver Knight tells in outdated, sometimes offensive, language a military history of the campaigns against the "savages" in the American West, arguing along the way that those who reported them to the press did so reliably most of the time.

Knight, a Depression-era newspaperman from Texas who served in the Army during World War II before earning a doctorate in

history from the University of Wisconsin, examines what he calls the Western War (from the Bozeman Trail clashes beginning in 1866 through the Wounded Knee “affair” of 1890) largely through the eyes of the twenty accredited correspondents who reported it to the nation’s newspapers. Six of the book’s eleven chapters (and part of a seventh) chronicle the Army’s campaigns against the Lakotas. Campaigns against the Cheyenne and the Modocs occupy a chapter each; those against the Nez Percés, Bannocks, and Apaches get lumped together with Wounded Knee into a catch-all chapter titled “Later and Lesser Campaigns.”

The opening chapter illustrates the mix of military and journalistic history found throughout the book. Of the chapter’s 29 pages, Knight devotes 26 to Indians and soldiers, three to correspondents. He improves in subsequent chapters, offering biographical sketches of correspondents and analysis of their reportage (which, by comparing their stories with official reports, he found accurate through the 1880s). Nevertheless, troop movements, strategy, and adventure, not the reporters, continue to hold center stage. In Knight’s defense, it must be said that little separated the correspondents from the soldiers: they ate, slept, traveled, and even fought together during most campaigns. Some of Knight’s best analysis comes in assessing Wounded Knee’s coverage, which he argues marked the end of honest reporting and the advent of “New Journalism” marked by “exaggerated, distorted, rumor-based, and even faked” dispatches (311). In addition, Wounded Knee drew 21 correspondents, more than all the preceding campaigns combined, according to Knight. Given the pivotal change in reporting by this record number of correspondents, the reader’s expectation of a significant discussion is greeted with a mere three pages.

Knight seems disturbingly blithe (though perhaps not by the standards of 1960) about calling Indians “savages,” some Sioux “wild” (161), and otherwise adopting his subjects’ attitudes towards their enemies. At least one caption, identifying only General George

Armstrong Custer out of five figures pictured, further reflects this bias. It would not have taken much work, by Knight or his press, to identify at least three of those people as Custer’s Indian scouts, including Bloody Knife.

Despite these criticisms, Knight’s work has value. It offers insights into the daily rigors of nineteenth-century Army life and examines the sources from which much public knowledge of Indians flowed. Fans of military history may enjoy the book and may join the correspondents’ armchair generalling, but readers interested in the correspondents and the history of journalism will have to wade through a lot of extraneous material to get what they want.

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