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1998

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Briscoe, James, "Review of *Cheyennes at Dark Water Creek: The Last Fight of the Red River War*. By William Y. Chalfant" (1998). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1279.
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Cheyennes at Dark Water Creek: The Last Fight of the Red River War. By William Y. Chalfant. Foreword by Father Peter John Powell. Illustrations by Mont David Williams. Maps by William L. Nelson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Foreword, illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xix + 232 pp. \$27.95.

William Chalfant presents a fairly detailed and objective history of the attack on Little Bull's encampment on Sappa Creek in 1875. Father Powell, an honorary Peace Chief of the Cheyenne Tribe and prominent Cheyenne historian, praises Chalfant's efforts in presenting an impartial and objective recounting of the events. More detached readers, however, will find a vein of sympathy in Chalfant's writing for the Cheyenne side of the story.

Chalfant provides a detailed background of the events leading up to and surrounding the Cheyenne involvement in the Buffalo or Red River Wars of 1872-74. This was a period of raiding and mass attacks by the Southern Plains Indians on buffalo hunters (the first action

was at the Adobe Walls hunter's camp) and settlements and farms in the old hunting grounds and elsewhere in a last desperate effort to save the bison herds and old way of life on the Plains. With few resources and heavily outgunned, the Southern Plains groups accomplished little and suffered the bulk of the casualties.

By the end of 1874, open hostilities had been brought to a halt by the Army, and a general roundup of hostiles was underway. Little Bull, like other band leaders, saw the roundup as an end to the traditional Cheyenne life on the Southern Plains and attempted to join the Northern Cheyenne bands, some five hundred miles to the north. Little Bull's was one of the smaller groups fleeing northward, numbering about seventy men, women, and children.

Little Bull made three grave mistakes during his band's flight for freedom. A number of cattle were taken on Punished Woman Creek near Fort Wallace in western Kansas, which alerted the Army to his whereabouts. Pursuit began by Company A, Sixth Cavalry, under the command of Lt. Austin Henely four days later. The second critical mistake was the ransacking of a hide hunter's camp that put the four hunters on a path to intercept the pursuing cavalry. Little Bull's third and final error was to go into encampment on Sappa Creek in the belief that his little band was safe from pursuit and discovery.

With the four hide hunters as guides, the cavalry overtook and attacked the encampment on 23 April 1875. The element of surprise was lost before the cavalry could reach the village and most of the band was able to escape. Twenty-seven villagers, however, were killed. Henely's force, including the four hide hunters, numbered forty well-armed men; the action against the handful of poorly armed men, women, and children was never in doubt. Those who did not escape were able to reach the height above the village and held the soldiers at bay for about three hours. Ultimately, the group on the heights was enveloped and killed.

Chalfant pays close attention to the aftermath of the fight and to the question of massacre, discussing the discrepancies between the official Indian casualty figures and the Cheyennes' oral traditions. He also raises the question of why no prisoners were taken. There is always a question of brutality and atrocity when a weaker, unsuspecting force is attacked by a larger determined one. This is particularly true when women and children are killed in such attacks. The point Chalfant misses in his analysis of the event is that all parties, combatants and non-combatants alike, are equally at risk in a fire fight, and it is understandable how women and children in the village became casualties. The Cheyennes, including women and children, undoubtedly expected to be killed by the soldiers and fought back as best they could. Soldiers in the heat of battle, by the same token, were likely to fire at any movement in the direction of the Indian positions.

The book is nevertheless an excellent recounting of a lesser known action and should prove useful to historians and absorbing to others.

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