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## Review of *Alias Frank Canton* By Robert K. DeArment

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*Alias Frank Canton.* By Robert K. DeArment. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. ix + 402 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

Robert K. DeArment renders an engaging, readable portrait of Frank Canton. In the course of his research, he uncovered numerous previously unused sources which help to explain how this former Texas convict could “change sides” and become a legendary lawman in Wyoming and Oklahoma.

Born Joe Horner and sentenced to the Texas State Prison in Huntsville for robbery under that name in 1877, he escaped from a work gang after two years, turning up in Wyoming with a new name, Frank Canton, and soon a new occupation—lawman. After service as sheriff of Johnson County, Canton threw in

with the so-called "Johnson County Invaders" in 1892, becoming co-leader of the group of cattlemen and gunfighters who made an ill-fated invasion of the northern Wyoming county. Though the mission failed, Canton gained the lifelong support of numerous influential politicians, US Senators Francis E. Warren and Joseph M. Carey among them. Such highly placed friends made it possible for the ex-convict to escape trial for his actions in Johnson County and led eventually to his appointment as adjutant general of the Oklahoma National Guard, a position he held until his death in 1927.

DeArment's treatment of Canton is complimentary even though the author reveals his hero's serious character flaws. For example, DeArment's research discloses that many of Canton's claims in his memoirs were, in fact, obvious falsehoods and self-serving misstatements. Despite the biographer's best efforts to paint him sympathetically, Canton comes across as a master manipulator who advanced his career only as a result of ruthless actions he undertook for the wealthy and influential.

During his lifetime, Canton, like any good confidence man, gave his all to curry the favor of the powerful. At each stage of his career, his efforts usually met with success. At one crucial point, at least, Canton seems to have taken in his biographer as well. In attempting to exonerate Canton from committing the murders preceding the Johnson County War, DeArment tries to prove that the real killer was in fact Tom Horn. In making this assertion, the author relies on the word of a single source, one he thoroughly discredits at another point in the narrative.

The only other flaw in an otherwise well-crafted and documented biography is the author's unquestioning endorsement of the invaders' side in the Johnson County War. The local Johnson County opponents of the big cattlemen are characterized as either rustlers or apologists for rustlers, while some of the most outrageous claims made by the invaders are repeated as truth.

Despite these weaknesses, DeArment's biography provides a sound portrait of Joe Horner/Frank Canton, the calculating opportunist who became an old West legend.

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