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## Review of *Red Crow, Warrior Chief* By Hugh A. Dempsey

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*Red Crow, Warrior Chief.* By Hugh A. Dempsey. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Books, and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. 247 pp. \$16.95.

At a time when Plains Indians are eagerly seeking to learn more of the history of their own tribes, Hugh A. Dempsey, curator of history at the Glenbow-Alberta Institute in Calgary, has effectively interpreted the nineteenth-century history of the nearby Blackfoot and Blood tribes through careful study of the lives and policies of their greatest leaders. In 1976 he gave us *Crowfoot, Chief of the Blackfeet*. Now he offers *Red Crow, Warrior Chief*, who was the recognized head chief of the Blood tribe during the late years of the nineteenth century. Both books have been solidly grounded in a quarter-century of thorough research in the published literature (including pioneer Alberta newspapers) and in widely scattered archives, as well as extended fieldwork on the reserves where the descendants of those chiefs reside. Older men and women have told their memories of the chiefs. Others have recalled episodes in the chiefs' lives as related to them by family members of an older generation who are no longer living. One of the author's sources on Red Crow was that chief's adopted but favorite child, Frank Red Crow. Fortunately for his readers, Dempsey has combined his thorough research with excellent judgment and a talent for writing lucid prose.

I concur with Dempsey's opinion that the Blood tribe of Indians is fortunate to have been led over the past 140 years by a succession of wise chiefs who were members of a single family of the Fish Eaters' Band. That band's rise to prominence in the tribe followed the marriage of Red Crow's attractive and talented aunt, Medicine Snake Woman, to Alexander Culbertson, the American Fur Company's leading trader on the Upper Missouri in 1840. This connection helped her brother, Seen From Afar, to gain recognition as the most important chief of his tribe. His nephew, Red Crow, who was born in 1830, earned recognition as a chief

in his own right by compiling an outstanding war record in some thirty-three actions against four enemy tribes, during which he demonstrated marked ability as a courageous and aggressive leader of men.

For three decades prior to his death in 1900 Red Crow led his tribe through the most difficult period of their existence—the transition from an independent, nomadic, buffalo-hunting way of life to settlement upon a reservation and dependence upon the Canadian government for rations. Like his uncle Seen From Afar, Red Crow was a proud and practical man. He neither feared the whites nor wasted time and energy blaming them for the hardships that befell his people with the disappearance of the buffalo. He saw clearly the need for his people to abandon some of their old ways and to learn new ones. The old warrior urged them to cease their interminable horse raids upon enemy tribes and to concentrate upon learning those skills that would help them to survive and to prosper on the reservation he had sought to get them from the government. Red Crow led by example as well as by policy-making. He settled down in a log cabin in the valley of his beloved Belly River, broke ground for crops, and acquired a herd of cattle. He sent his children to mission schools. At the same time he stubbornly refused to sell an acre of reservation land to the whites, and he insisted that the government recognize his tribe's right to practice their traditional religion.

When I came to know the Blood Indians more than forty years after Red Crow's death, they had clung to his policy of holding on to their land. They occupied the largest Indian reserve in Canada, and it was remarkably good agricultural and range land. They owned the largest wheat field in Canada, and in the early '50s oil was discovered in the middle of it. Yet each summer a large portion of the tribe gathered on the Belly Buttes to set up their camp circle of painted tipis, in the center of which they performed the traditional ceremonies of the secret Horns Society, the women's Matokiks, and the great tribal Sun Dance. It seemed to me that Blood Indian culture at

that time comprised a unique blend of economic progressiveness and religious conservatism. Hugh Dempsey has identified these characteristics of modern Blood Indian culture, together with the continued pride in themselves that is so evident among the Blood Indians, as a legacy from their great chief, Red Crow.

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