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Review of *Frontier Soldier: An Enlisted Man's Journal of the Sioux and Nez Perce Campaigns, 1877* By Private William F. Zimmer

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Frontier Soldier: An Enlisted Man's Journal of the Sioux and Nez Perce Campaigns, 1877. By Private William F. Zimmer. Edited and annotated by Jerome A. Greene. Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1998. Maps, photographs, index. x + 171 pp. \$32.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

The two journals of Private Zimmer presented here add substantially to the documentary record of Army operations on the Northern Plains during the final months of the Sioux War and its immediate aftermath. Zimmer's unit, Company F, Second Cavalry, took part in the Lama Deer fight against the Sioux on 7 May 1877, and the battle of Bear's Paw Mountains against the fleeing Nez Perce between 30 September and 5 October of the same year. The journals, dated 31 March-31 July and 1 August-31 December, 1877, include accounts of these engagements and of much else their author saw, reflected on, and heard about. Zimmer was an articulate young man with a wide range of interests, a lively sense of humor, and a taste for reading. As a photographed page of the manuscript makes clear,

his spelling and punctuation skills were minimal. The regularized text offered by editor Jerome A. Greene therefore lacks the full gamy flavor of the original, yet is readily comprehensible and does convey a zestful sense of Zimmer's personality.

The manuscript journals are actually rewritings of ones, now lost, that Zimmer had earlier set down in the field. Their original audience was likely a limited one, family members or close acquaintances for whom the former soldier was providing a detailed account of his adventures. He expressed an intention to carry the day-to-day record forward to 1 March 1878, making a full year, but there is no evidence he ever did so. Near the end of the first journal he admitted being "tired of copying."

Zimmer's inquisitive cast of mind and his wish to satisfy the curiosity of his readers yielded journal texts that exhibit an unusual range of coverage. Naturally he has much to say of military matters, especially those within the purview of an enlisted soldier. Accounts of difficulties moving the bulky wagons across broken country, of queasy reluctance to consume just-slaughtered horseflesh, of his comrades' sometimes drunken behavior—passages like these lend the journals a grainy egalitarian realism. Yet they are of equal interest for their attention to unofficial matters. For example, Zimmer recounts at second hand the attractions of a Miles City dance hall. He writes often and sometimes at length of animals he encountered—buffalo, rattlesnakes, antelope, prairie dogs, a badger; of Indian customs and beliefs; of fossils, agates, and petrifications collected by his comrades; of steamboats passing up and down the river, or else run aground; of the remarkable intelligence of the pack mules. Clearly he had no serious complaints about his often arduous military service; he was glad to be where he was, regarding the northern frontier as almost a land of wonders.

The research that underlies Jerome A. Greene's editorship of this volume is primarily an outgrowth of his work on *Yellowstone Command* (1991), a study of Colonel Nelson

A. Miles during the Sioux War, and of subsequent writing about Miles and the Nez Perce campaign. Greene's thorough familiarity with the history, topography, and inhabitants of the region traversed by the forces under Miles in 1877 is evident in his detailed annotations—and sometimes corrections—of the Zimmer text. The volume does not include a bibliography, but citations of relevant related works are provided in footnotes. The index, though reasonably thorough for proper names, would be strengthened by additional subject entries of the topics taken up by Zimmer. In every other respect, including the maps and photographs that complement the text, this modest volume is a solid success, a model of its kind.

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