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## Review of *The Cowboy Cavalry: The Story of the Rocky Mountain Rangers* By Gordon E. Tolton

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often ignored in standard accounts focusing on Saskatchewan and the Frog Lake area of Alberta.

The first part of *The Cowboy Cavalry* places the Rangers' activities of 1885 in the larger context of Louis Riel and the Métis, and especially the Aboriginal groups of southern Alberta: the Peigan, Blood, and Blackfoot peoples, who were then on the verge of starvation. When trouble broke out in the spring of 1885 there was panic among the settlers and ranchers of the area, but the restraining leadership of Crowfoot, and especially Red Crow, kept any large-scale violence at bay. Nevertheless, John Stewart, a well-connected former militia officer turned rancher, raised a unit of three mounted companies of ranchers and former North-West Mounted Police officers from around the town of Macleod.

The book's strongest section concerns the organization and activities of the Rocky Mountain Rangers during their brief existence and the personal histories of individual rangers. They were dressed and armed like cowboys, and included in their number such interesting characters as Billy Jackson, who had been with Major Marcus Reno at the Little Big Horn; "Kootenai" Brown, a former English officer turned mountain man; and scout "Rattlesnake Jack" Robson. The Rangers did not fight in any of the battles of the rebellion, and they failed in what was probably their most important single mission, preventing the escape of Gabriel Dumont into the United States, but from their headquarters at Medicine Hat they patrolled the area from High River to the Cypress Hills in the east, observing any Aboriginal groups, including those across the border, that might be thinking of joining Riel, while U.S. patrols from Forts Assiniboine and Abraham Lincoln, operating south of the forty-ninth parallel, did the same.

The book would have benefited from comparisons of other similar units raised during 1885, including Boulton's Mounted Infantry, French's Scouts, Steele's Scouts, the Dominion Land Surveyors' Intelligence Unit, the Moose Mountain Scouts, "Stimson's Scouts," and the Alberta Mounted Rifles, some of which are mentioned in their connection to the Rocky Mountain Rangers. The most stark and interesting comparison would have been with the Métis scouts of the

*The Cowboy Cavalry: The Story of the Rocky Mountain Rangers.* By Gordon E. Tolton. Victoria, BC: Heritage House, 2011. 239 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$22.95 paper.

Gordon E. Tolton's detailed description of the activities of the Rocky Mountain Rangers adds new research to an earlier book of his published in 1994. The Rangers existed for just three months and saw no real action, but through their history one can learn much about southern Alberta during the North-West Rebellion of 1885 that is

Wood Mountain and Willow Bunch area, raised by Jean-Louis Légaré and paid to keep busy and out of the rebellion by the government. The “Wood Mountain Scouts” patrolled the border east of the Rangers’ territory, but while their former members struggled to survive after 1885, many of the Rangers become prominent and successful men, including Richard Boyle, who eventually became an English earl, and John Herron, a Canadian MP.

Although there are some minor inaccuracies in the text (“gunpowder diplomacy,” for example, should have been “gunboat diplomacy”), *The Cowboy Cavalry* fills an important gap in our understanding of the events of 1885 in southern Alberta.

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