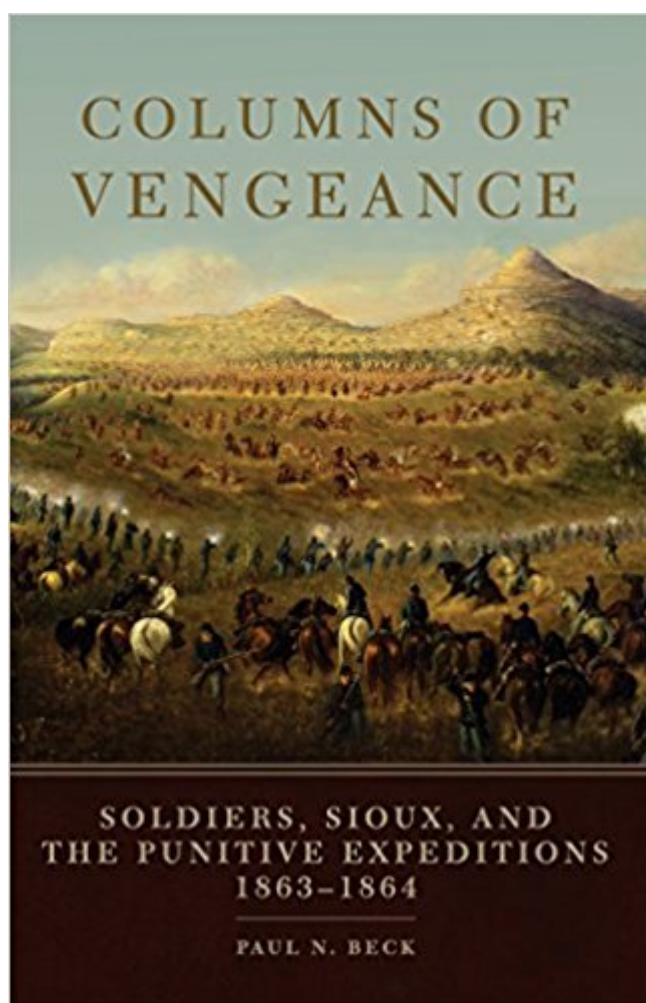


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Columns Of Vengeance: Soldiers, Sioux, And The Punitive Expeditions, 1863–1864



Synopsis

In summer 1862, Minnesotans found themselves fighting interconnected wars—the first against the rebellious Southern states, and the second an internal war against the Sioux. While the Civil War was more important to the future of the United States, the Dakota War of 1862 proved far more destructive to the people of Minnesota—both whites and American Indians. It led to U.S. military action against the Sioux, divided the Dakotas over whether to fight or not, and left hundreds of white settlers dead. In *Columns of Vengeance*, historian Paul N. Beck offers a reappraisal of the Punitive Expeditions of 1863 and 1864, the U.S. Army's response to the Dakota War of 1862. Whereas previous accounts have approached the Punitive Expeditions as a military campaign of the Indian Wars, Beck argues that the expeditions were also an extension of the Civil War. The strategy and tactics reflected those of the war in the East, and Civil War operations directly affected planning and logistics in the West. Beck also examines the devastating impact the expeditions had on the various bands and tribes of the Sioux. Whites viewed the expeditions as punishment—“columns of vengeance” sent against those Dakotas who had started the war in 1862—yet the majority of the Sioux the army encountered had little or nothing to do with the earlier uprising in Minnesota. Rather than relying only on the official records of the commanding officers involved, Beck presents a much fuller picture of the conflict by consulting the letters, diaries, and personal accounts of the common soldiers who took part in the expeditions, as well as rare personal narratives from the Dakotas. Drawing on a wealth of firsthand accounts and linking the Punitive Expeditions of 1863 and 1864 to the overall Civil War experience, *Columns of Vengeance* offers fresh insight into an important chapter in the development of U.S. military operations against the Sioux.

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Customer Reviews

“Far from any traditional Civil War battlefield, the Union Army’s 1863 and 1864 excursions into the Northern Great Plains were no mere sidelight. The army overlooked and underappreciated expeditions of revenge against the Plains Indians set the stage for military conflicts that wrested Sioux Country from its Native inhabitants a decade later. In *Columns of Vengeance*, Paul Beck, a longtime student of the era, has crafted an intimate narrative that gives voice to the soldiers who made these epic, tragic treks and the Plains Indians they fought.”
—R. Eli Paul, author of *Blue Water Creek and the First Sioux War, 1854–1856*
“Peppered with fascinating accounts of battles, military life, and glimpses into the participants’ innermost thoughts.”
—*Kansas History*

Paul N. Beck is Professor of History at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, and author of *Inkpaduta: Dakota Leader*.

I have three words for you: NEW MILITARY HISTORY!!! Beck beautifully illustrates a harsh, violent era built on vengeance that encapsulated the plains of North Dakota and Minnesota in the early 1860s in a way that other scholars have failed to do. By painstakingly seeking out, researching, and drawing conclusions from hundreds of primary sources left by the thousands of ordinary soldiers that took part in a war - and not JUST the official documents created by generals who wished to make every battle look like it was a complete success - Beck has accomplished detailing the complete story of the U.S. - Dakota War of 1862-65. Furthermore, sources detailing the actions and rationale of the Dakota Sioux, who was the military opponent of these previously-mentioned white American soldiers, are used throughout this book. Detailing the Indian’s perspective on this three-year-long war - from the reasons they felt compelled to attack the whites as well as their excellent plan of attack at various battles like Big Mound, Killdeer Mountain, and The Badlands - is an aspect often ignored, or at least less emphasized, by Beck’s predecessors. It is likely still wise to read other histories (see Michael Clodfelter’s and Doreen Chaky’s works) of this time period in order to gather more detail on the entirety of this war (especially concerning the predicament of the Dakota in the decades before this final act of rebellion), but Beck’s book remains a true treasure for

the scholar or casual reader interested in how the ordinary soldier dealt with all aspects of this great war on the northern Plains.

Paul Beck did a masterful job weaving the tale of the post 1862 Dakota Massacre, as volunteer soldiers of the Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin volunteers under field commanders, Sibley and Sully, hounded the Sioux who had fled Minnesota to the Dakota Territory. His use of primary source materials--letters of the soldiers battling the Sioux--to tell the tale of the aftermath of the Dakota uprising lends a personal perspective to this most interesting period of frontier history. The majority of the soldiers had enlisted to fight the Confederates in the southern theatre of the Civil War, and most were disappointed to be used to fight the Sioux on the frontier instead. Mr. Beck poignantly demonstrates that most of the Sioux against whom the soldiers fought had taken no part in the uprising in Minnesota; most were non-resister components of the Santee Sioux who sought to live separately or commingled with their Yankton, Yanktonais, and Lakota relatives in the Dakotas. It didn't make any difference to the Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin troops-- mostly Minnesotans--who were bent on vengeance following the 1862 Uprising. These "columns of vengeance", who indiscriminately dealt death to Yanktonais and Lakota alike, though these divisions of the Sioux had nothing to do with their Santee relatives' actions in Minnesota, paved the way for the plains warfare with the Sioux that dominated the later 1860s through 1890. Beck's development of the relationships between the army's commanders--Sibley, Sully, and Pope--indeed enlightens motives for the military's aggressive policy towards all Sioux, whether Santee, who promulgated the Uprising, or their plains relatives, who had nothing to do with what happened in Minnesota. Though not detracting from the scholarly tone of the narrative, misspellings and editorial oversights of other minor publishing mistakes, are niggling. So, a 5 star for interest and scholarship and a 3 for editorialship--hence, a 4 star. A great read! Recommended.

Though less detailed on the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota side, Beck's work explores the motivations and results of these (until recently) little studied campaigns. In the process, Beck challenges commonly held perceptions of their purpose, success and impact. While imperfect at points, it generally achieves its purposes, providing new questions and directions for the future.

This book has excellent research and is well written. It covers the "revenge campaign" against the Santee Sioux for the Minnesota uprising and subsequent murders of over 400 settlers in 1862. The book uses primary research - the letters of the soldiers who were involved in the campaigns of 1863

and 1864 and the statements of some of the Indians. The writer weaves these comments with his own writing that does an excellent job of integration. The maps are also good identifying where the campaigns of 1863 and 1864 went and where the primary battles were fought. What comes through from this book was the utter stupidity of these campaigns. By early 1863, prior to the start of the first campaign, most of the Indian "resisters" involved in the 1862 uprising and murders were either dead, confined in jail or in Canada. There were still a few with the Yanktonais and Lakota Sioux but these were minimal in comparison with the rest of the Indians. So, what these military campaigns did was committed their murders and massacres of innocent Indian women and children. And, this resulted in enraging the Lakota Sioux, including Sitting Bull, resulting in continued warfare through the Custer's Last Stand in 1876 and beyond. I highly recommend this book to any reader interested in a true and accurate depiction of these campaigns.

When the Indian Wars in the 19th century American West are mentioned, Geronimo, Little Bighorn, and Wounded Knee usually come to mind. But this book covers the 1863-1864 campaigns launched by the Union army against the Sioux Indians in North Dakota following the 1862 Sioux Uprising in Minnesota. While these campaigns involved some of the largest Indian-white battles on the northern plains, they have been overshadowed because the very years they were occurring, large Civil War battles back east like Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Spotsylvania were being fought at the same time, and thus Americans gave them more attention. This is a good book that anyone interested in the Civil War or Indian Wars will enjoy reading.

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