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Perilous Pursuit: The U.S. Cavalry and the Northern
Cheyennes (review)

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versity of Georgia, focuses on the war's causes and the Paraguayan offensive of 1864–66, leaving the allied offensive, the stalemate, and the war's effects for the second volume.

Whigham locates the geopolitical roots of the conflict in the contest for control of access to the Plata River system. At independence in the 1820s, Uruguay and Paraguay became independent buffer states between Portuguese Brazil and Spanish Argentina. Yet the issue remained alive because of Brazilian national pride and their desire to guarantee river passage to their western Mato Grosso territory. When Brazil intervened in Uruguayan politics in 1864, the small mestizo nation of Paraguay responded to the Brazilian challenge.

Paraguayan president Francisco Solano López had inherited the presidency from his father. He combined a large ego, a patriarchal attitude toward his subjects, and a pride in his modern military organization. He feared that Brazil and Argentina would easily absorb his nation and Uruguay if war came, so he attacked the Brazilian Mato Grosso in December 1864. López planned then to drive to the southeast to reinforce Brazilian enemies in Uruguay. The Uruguayan campaign depended upon securing the allegiance of Argentine caudillos in the neighboring provinces of Entre Ríos and Corrientes, but López muffed the effort to win them over in time. His invasion of Corrientes in April 1865 spurred the formation of the Triple Alliance, pledged not just to defeat Paraguay, but to remove López from power.

López lost most of his navy in June 1865 and by November had fumbled away his chance at victory. His insistence on directing all aspects of the war and on leaving his officers in the dark as to his intentions undercut their confidence and capabilities. By mid-1866, the Paraguayan offensive had been checked, but the poorly coordinated allies foolishly did not press their advantage, thus contributing to a stalemate that would last for four more years.

Previously, historians have often portrayed López either as insane or as a nationalist hero. Whigham's contribution is a detailed narrative that reveals a López whose strategic and geopolitical instincts were sound but whose arrogance undercut his ability to lead. The description of the geographic setting and the vivid thumbnail sketches of many of the officers further elevate the account beyond that of one man's blindness. The reader understands the full history of a tragic war, lengthened because of incompetence and errors on all sides. If López's hubris was great, so too was that of the Argentines and Brazilians. They dismissed the Paraguayan as a madman or a "monkey," but their presumably superior nations and armies could not defeat him without great cost to themselves.

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Perilous Pursuit: The U. S. Cavalry and the Northern Cheyennes. By Stan Hoig. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002. ISBN 0-87081-660-8. Maps. Photographs. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 292. \$34.95.

In spring 1877, following a long winter of hard campaigning, most of the Northern Cheyennes turned themselves in to the United States Army. Reluctantly, they agreed to leave their traditional homelands in the Black Hills and go south to the Indian Territory, where they might be attached to the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation. Once there, however, the Northern Cheyennes found few of the government's promises to be true. Annuities were inevitably shorted, relations with their southern cousins quickly soured, and the buffalo had been hunted nearly to extinction. In September 1878, the Northern Cheyennes left their reservation in a desperate effort to go home. Over the next ten weeks, they outmaneuvered, outmarched, and outfought numerous army columns as they wound their way through Kansas and Nebraska. In the end, however, the government's overwhelming superiority of resources proved too much, and the most of the tribe was returned south.

The story of the Northern Cheyennes and the U. S. cavalry—a mixture of hope, heroism, broken promises, ineptitude, suffering, and tragedy—has been told many times, but has only recently received the systematic scholarly attention it deserves. Relying heavily on previously ignored materials from several military courts-martial and the papers from the Cheyenne/Arapaho Agency, Stan Hoig's *Perilous Pursuit* provides a detailed description of the flights, imprisonments, escapes, and captures of the Northern Cheyennes. He demonstrates that the Indians employed superior tactics and capitalized on the longer range of their weapons to consistently best their regular army foes. Moreover, army officers, few of whom ever “really comprehended the full desperation of the Northern Cheyenne” (p. 53), frequently underestimated their enemies. Mixed with misguided policies and general bureaucratic ineptitude, Hoig finds the resulting brew to have been an embarrassment to the army and a black stain on the government's handling of Indian affairs.

Author of over a dozen books on the West, the Indians, and the army, Hoig is a seasoned professional with a journalist's flair for the dramatic. His *Perilous Pursuit* will inevitably be compared to John H. Monnett's recent book (*Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes*, 2001) on the same subject. This reviewer finds Monnett superior in capturing the Northern Cheyenne world view and in setting these events within a larger western context, whereas Hoig, incorporating materials from a greater range of sources, covers similar ground in greater detail while more effectively explicating the army's failures and frustrations. Collectively, these two accounts contribute a nuanced and sophisticated analysis of both the Northern Cheyenne odyssey and the army's inability to implement a flawed national policy.

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