

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 1983

**Review of *Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War*
By Jerome A. Greene**

Thomas William Dunlay
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Dunlay, Thomas William, "Review of *Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War* By Jerome A. Greene" (1983). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1682.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1682>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Slim Buttes, 1876: An Episode of the Great Sioux War. By Jerome A. Greene. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. Illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xvi + 192 pp. \$12.95.

Books on the Sioux War of 1876 tend to concentrate on the defeat of George A. Custer at the Little Bighorn and either slight or ignore the months of campaigning that followed that disaster. Both buffs and scholars should therefore welcome Jerome Greene's study of the operations of General George Crook in August and September 1876. Although especially arduous and frustrating, the campaign and its climactic battle at Slim Buttes, South Dakota, were far more typical of the wars on the plains than Custer's spectacular downfall.

The campaign became known as the "Horsemeat March," because the failure of supplies forced the soldiers to eat their own mounts, who were themselves dying because of the hardships. The engagement at Slim Buttes on 9 September 1876 resulted from an accidental encounter with a body of Indians returning to the reservation, but it gave the army and Crook a modest success to boast of after a frustrating and humiliating summer.

The author has made good use of eyewitness accounts, including those of several newspaper correspondents attached to Crook's command. He has resisted the temptation to expand at length on the colorful personalities of many of the participants, and he does not indulge in the indignation so evident in recent writing in this field. He has made use of Indian evidence to the extent that it is available, without claiming to present the "Indian side" of the story.

His style is seldom picturesque and he refrains from dogmatic conclusions. This does not mean that he has no opinions, for the book is sharply critical of Crook, and certainly the general did not enhance his reputation as an Indian-fighter in this campaign.

Greene considers that the attack on the Indian camp at Slim Buttes was part of a policy of total war, or "extermination," against the Sioux. In fact, the Indians suffered fewer than a dozen casualties in the action; the significant result lay in the destruction of their property and the blow to their morale, and this was the case with most such attacks.

Since Greene is critical of Crook's conduct of the campaign, he should perhaps have noted the general's own analysis of the difficulties he encountered. Crook attributed his problems first to the lack of enough mules for transport, which led to the starvation march, and second to the lack of Indian scouts, which so limited his reconnaissance capability that any results were a matter of luck. This analysis is readily available in Crook's published autobiography.

Two maps showing different phases of the battle are quite helpful; the overall cam-

paign map, on the other hand, is almost unusable.

THOMAS WILLIAM DUNLAY
Center for Great Plains Studies
Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition
University of Nebraska-Lincoln