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Review of *War Party in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the U.S. Army* by Mark van de Logt

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*War Party in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the U.S. Army.* By Mark van de Logt. Foreword by Walter R. Echo-Hawk. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. xviii + 350 pp. Map, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

There are many positive things to say about Mark van de Logt's study of Pawnee Indian scouts. The research, particularly in primary sources, is deep, while van de Logt's prose is so clean it practically sparkles. *War Party in Blue* is the result of great care taken by both author and press.

Van de Logt's intent, as expressed in his clear and concise introduction, is to revise traditional interpretations that attribute the scouts' success to Major Frank North's leadership. Given the contours of historical scholarship in the mid-twentieth century, as well as the voluminous accounts left us by Luther North, Frank's brother, this state of affairs was probably unavoidable. *War Party in Blue* seeks to correct these accounts by placing "the experiences of the Pawnee scouts themselves" at the center of the story. Instead of promising us a traditional narrative supplemented by Pawnee sources, van de Logt argues that "military service reinforced established Pawnee martial values and customs," while the maintenance of these values, customs, and, one might add, tribal enmities toward other American Indians in the region, explain the effectiveness of the Pawnees as auxiliaries of the United States

Army. Far from leading the Pawnees, North and his officers, a disconcerting number of whom were personally related, were only “nominally in charge,” as “the tactics, style, and conduct of warfare were decidedly Pawnee.” “Although the scouts proudly wore the army blue . . . they never ceased to be Pawnees,” van de Logt concludes. “The Pawnee battalion was truly a war party in blue.”

To make this case, van de Logt not only reinterprets traditional sources using insights gleaned from ethnographic studies of the Pawnees, inserting, where relevant, the findings of such scholars as Elliott West and Richard White, but rather he displays a laudatory willingness to integrate Pawnee oral tradition into his narrative. And, thanks to the extensive nature of Pawnee military service in the 1860s and 1870s, van de Logt covers a lot of ground. Indeed, anyone interested in the Indian Wars in the Southern and Northern Plains will learn something about campaigns in both regions.

Notwithstanding all this, *War Party in Blue* falls short of its stated goals. After laying out his argument in the introduction and developing the necessary context for it in chapter 1 (“Pawnee Military Culture in the Mid-1800s”), van de Logt abruptly abandons it. In its stead comes a standard chronological military history of the scouts and their service, leaving a confused reader to wonder why the author spurns the analytical framework he has just explicated in favor of a narrative history that closely resembles, in both style and substance, William Leckie’s classic study of African American soldiers (*The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West*, 1967). This is both confusing and disappointing. Not even his fine chapter “Homecoming,” which takes the story of the scouts into the mid-twentieth century, fully alleviates the feeling that *War Party in Blue*, as professional as it is, represents something of an opportunity lost.

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