

# UCLA

## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

War Parties in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the US Army. By Mark Van De Logt.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5h50b7k6>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 36(3)

### ISSN

0161-6463

### Author

Riding In, James

### Publication Date

2012-06-01

### DOI

10.17953

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

the book's organization means that the reader need not consult supplementary books or research to understand the content.

Huffman's book takes a common-sense approach and contributes to the discipline by clearly elaborating on sociological thought and adding modes of expression to discuss American Indian educational achievement. It will interest graduate students, professors, academics, policy researchers, and some advanced undergraduates, though perhaps it is best suited for a mid-level graduate course or upper-division undergraduate course in American Indian studies, ethnic studies, education, or sociology. *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education* is an excellent instructional tool on how to conceptualize and define certain aspects of scholarly discourse, so it would also contribute to qualitative methods or education theory courses. Additionally, it can serve as a useful orientation guide for developing a research question, a theoretical framework for a research project, thesis, or dissertation, or reference for a comprehensive literature review. Finally, *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education* easily stands alone as a rich starting point for research on the American Indian educational achievement gap.

Christie Poitra

Michigan State University College of Education

**War Parties in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the US Army.** By Mark Van De Logt. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. 368 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Fortunately, Mark Van De Logt's *War Parties in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the US Army* is not another glorification of Frank J. North, the white American commander of most Pawnee scout units. In the late nineteenth century North's younger brother Luther, who also served as an officer of the Pawnee scouts, embarked on a campaign to immortalize Frank (who died prematurely in 1884) as a fearless frontiersman and Indian fighter whose command of Pawnee scouts played a vital role in the opening of the West. Luther North found a willing disciple in George Bird Grinnell, a noted naturalist, ethnographer, and writer who, after meeting Frank North and several Pawnees in 1870 and participating in an 1872 Pawnee buffalo hunt, developed an enduring interest in Plains Indian histories, cultures, and warfare.

Grinnell adhered to nineteenth-century ideologies that proclaimed white American intellectual and cultural superiority over Indians. His portrayal of the North brothers in *Pawnee Hero Stories* (1889) and *Two Great Scouts and Their Pawnee Battalion: The Experiences of Frank J. North and Luther H. North* (1928) relies on selective information provided mostly by Luther, as well as

constructions of the racialized “other.” Echoing the celebratory refrains of both Frank and himself, Luther’s own recollections, *Man of the Plains* (1961), sought to cement the myth. According to the North/Grinnell narrative, the gallant, heroic, and charismatic Frank North galloped ahead of his faithful and obedient Pawnee scouts into the pages of history. With Frank leading the charge, the scouts defeated their Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho adversaries in numerous battles and skirmishes, protecting railroad construction and clearing the way for US settlement of the plains. With its virtuous Euro-Americans triumphing over Indian “savagery,” this politicized history provides only superficial details about individual scouts or how Pawnee culture influenced the scouts’ conduct in warfare, with a few exceptions.

Fortunately, scholars such as Van De Logt have begun to question the North/Grinnell narrative and to construct a deeper and more realistic understanding of the Pawnee scouts and their contributions. *War Parties in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the US Army* largely accomplishes this objective by examining familiar and previously untapped historical sources including Veterans Affairs records, US military correspondence and reports, and ethnographic field notes. One outcome of this research is that men bearing such names as Ruling His Son, Roam Chief, Riding In, Frank White, Billy Osborne, Echo Hawk, Little Fox, Like a Fox, Pakixsaks, Acting Like a Bear, Peter Headman, Little Ears, and many others, become integral to the story. Because Pawnee men change their names after distinguishing themselves in battle, some of the names appear only once or twice, never to be seen again. Van De Logt uses newspaper articles and firsthand narratives to highlight the scouts’ diverse personalities, while recorded interviews given by former scouts reveal new details about their individual experiences and Frank North. For instance, Ruling His Son provided an account of an 1868 or 1869 fight, resulting in the battlefield death of a Sioux enemy, which differs substantially from Luther North’s version placing Frank at the battle’s center.

The author notes that Frank North, a relatively young man with no previous military experience when he first became a lieutenant with the Pawnee scouts in 1864, actually exerted minimal control over seasoned Pawnee warriors under his command. Consequently, North usually found himself following the scouts into battle, rather than leading. Although the scouts recognized North as a courageous war leader and gave him two Pawnee names, they accepted discipline from him when warranted and otherwise rejected it. In 1867, a large number of them “mutinied” and returned to their reservation because North had apparently unjustly punished several of them. Yet North adopted such Pawnee war customs as singing Pawnee war songs and dividing captured enemy property among the scouts. Van De Logt suggests that some scouts

thought that North possessed spiritual protection from the Pawnee creator because he miraculously escaped death on several occasions.

As Van De Logt's title suggests, Pawnee scouts followed their own cultural practices in the US Army. Rather than rigidly adhering to army regulations, procedures, and protocol, they mostly functioned in conformity with Pawnee war traditions. They organized themselves in accordance with their four band divisions, used ceremony and personal bundles as spiritual protection, painted their faces, sang war songs, and celebrated victories with dances. They also relied on customary military tactics that included the element of surprise, stripping for battle, taking scalps, and targeting enemy horses and property as spoils of war. Armed with US weapons, the scouts indeed recorded a legacy of being a formidable fighting force that avenged the bloody aggressions of their Sioux and Cheyenne enemies.

Not all army personnel viewed the service of the Pawnees favorably, but the scouts' successful actions eventually won over most of their critics. Assessing why Pawnees sided with the US government, Van De Logt rightly stresses that the "Pawnees were not 'duped' into fight against people of their own race by the American government, as has sometimes been charged" (241). Although the North/Grinnell narrative asserts that the Pawnee scouts never lost a man in battle, Van De Logt dispels this myth. He notes that two scouts, along with other Pawnee men, died during an 1868 fight with an unspecified Sioux party, and another succumbed the same year from wounds suffered in a skirmish with some Yanktons. Others died from the accidental discharge of weapons and illness, while still others received wounds in battle and injuries from noncombat activities. Another valuable contribution is the author's account of Pawnee scout contact with members of enemy nations who were also serving with US army units during the 1876–77 war. He informs the reader that tensions between Sioux and Pawnee scouts ran high and nearly erupted in conflict on several occasions, though eventually their interactions became less contentious.

Van De Logt does not limit the story to those men he broadly refers to as "the Pawnee scout battalion," who served with Frank North in the 1864, 1865, 1868, 1869, 1870, and 1876–77 deployments. He dates the beginning of the Pawnee/US alliance to 1857, when five Pawnees scouted for a US campaign against Cheyennes. From 1870 to 1874 other Pawnees made significant contributions to what the author refers to as "freelance scouting operations." For example, in 1870 two Pawnees and Frank North guided the Marsh scientific expedition to the western plains and the Rockies, and during the Red River War of 1874, eighteen Pawnees, along with other Indian scouts, participated in US army operations on the southern plains against Comanche resistance. That same year four Pawnees guided a US army force into Sioux country.

Van De Logt concludes the book with a glimpse into the lives and deaths of some former scouts within the confines of an Indian Territory reservation. The reservation was plagued by disease, a high mortality rate, poverty, and previously unknown social problems such as suicide, alcoholism, and domestic violence. In this environment, many of them became healers, spiritual practitioners, and political leaders, while some also joined the Ghost Dance movement because of the deplorable conditions. Some sought to use their reputations as leverage to convince US agents to treat their people more humanely. After former Indian scouts became eligible for veteran pensions in 1917, surviving Pawnee scouts often experienced frustration while trying to satisfy bureaucratic requirements that they prove they had been in the US army, but with eventual success in many instances.

Although shedding new light on Pawnee scout history, this book is not without its shortcomings, especially in its critical assessment of Pawnee interaction with white American civilians and government officials. Undoubtedly, Pawnee desires to retaliate against their Indian enemies and to push them away from their homeland came into play in their decision to ally themselves militarily with the US government, but the growing presence of hostile white settlers in Nebraska and Kansas was an equally pressing concern. The author ignores the fact that by 1864, white homesteads and settlements and their accompanying economic activities had virtually surrounded the Pawnee reservation.

Unfortunately, because the book does not analyze the complexities of Pawnee relations with white Americans and the US government before, during, and after the active years of the Pawnee scouts' campaigns, or consider this history in the context of colonialism, it leaves many questions unanswered. Did the Pawnee leaders develop a multidimensional policy of accommodation in the hope of easing racial tensions with the white American newcomers, including many who wanted to rid the countryside of all Indians, as a means to retain their sovereignty, culture, and landholdings? Was this military alliance then an element of a Pawnee survival strategy? Is so, to what extent was this alliance successful in achieving its objectives from a nineteenth-century Pawnee perspective?

Despite these concerns, this book represents a significant departure from the story of the Pawnee scouts that Luther North and George Bird Grinnell told. By drawing from primary sources, Van De Logt broadens our knowledge of this cadre of men and their relations with the North brothers, other Indian scouts, Indian enemies, and US soldiers. Students of military history and Plains Indian history will find this study useful, but scholars of American Indian studies likely will find the study lacking.

*James Riding In*  
Arizona State University, Tempe