
John H. Monnett, ed. *Eyewitness to the Fetterman Fight: Indian Views*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2017. 248 pp. ISBN: 978-0806155821.

<http://www.oupres.com/ECommerce/Book/Detail/2189/eyewitness%20to%20the%20fetterman%20fight>

As with most battles and massacres of the Plains Indian Wars, the historical memory of the Fetterman Fight on December 21, 1866 seldom includes Indigenous perspectives and interpretations. John H. Monnett addresses this predicament through an edited synthesis of Lakota and Northern Cheyenne eyewitness accounts, to reexamine the traditional narrative of this battle. Early twentieth-century ethnographers and historians characterized the defeat of Captain William J. Fetterman's command of nearly eighty soldiers near Fort Phil Kearny in northern Wyoming as a disaster that resulted from Fetterman's disobedience and arrogance. Monnett sheds light on this misconception, arguing instead that the fight was one of the most strategic Indigenous victories on the Northern Plains. Since there were no survivors of Fetterman's command to remark on their experience or Fetterman's frame of mind, scholars previously relied on scant documentary evidence and the maligned impressions of non-participants at Fort Phil Kearny. Until the expansion of ethnohistory in the 1970s, historians did not consider Native sources of historical memory as valid forms of history. Monnett provides an avenue for these Lakota and Northern Cheyenne voices to not only broaden the context, but to reclaim the Fetterman Fight's historical narrative.

Monnett defines the purpose of his work as both historical and methodological. Through the accounts of Joseph White Bull, Fire Thunder, American Horse and others, the alliance of Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors denoted careful strategizing, knowledge of the geography, and tactical skill. Monnett emphasizes that these communities of the lush Powder River region had legitimate reason to defend their accessibility to the ecosystem, hunting ranges, and trade (Monnett 8). For the Lakota, maintaining control over this contested space had been crucial since acquiring the basin from the Crow in 1857. Older, secondary literature eschews this critical understanding of intertribal relations and the culture of Plains Indian warfare. Monnett restores this cultural significance through his assembly of Lakota and Northern Cheyenne perspectives to reveal how the Fetterman Fight had implications regarding both the land and successive generations. Best resonated in the words of Bill Tallbull, a grandson of a warrior in the battle, the Lakotas and Northern Cheyennes "were fighting for their families and their future" (137). Preserving the memory of family members and tribal leaders involved in the Fetterman Fight meant memorializing their legacy as both a personal feat and defenders of the community.

From a methodological standpoint, the impressive arrangement of eyewitness accounts enables readers to interact with the sources in their raw form and approach the production of history from an ethnohistorical perspective. Monnett situates his collection of published and unpublished interviews with historical context and his own scrupulous interpretations and critiques for guidance. In each testimony, he is cautious not to overshadow the strength of Indigenous

narrations with his own voice. Furthermore, Monnett warns the reader to be conscious of the interviewer's positionality in these accounts. Whether ethnographers embellished the oral histories for audience appeal or used the knowledge of their Native subjects for personal advancement, Monnett addresses this predicament of validity in Native testimonies with an approach of transparency. Best exemplified in John G. Neihardt's interview of the Oglala warrior, Fire Thunder, Monnett provides both the original transcription and how it appeared in *Black Elk Speaks*. In doing so, Monnett offers an important lesson in linguistic floridity and manipulation by non-Native interviewers. He emphasizes the importance of this skill again in other, more ambiguous accounts where it is especially challenging to extrapolate the veracity from the interviewer's embellishment. In total, the diverse array of Lakota and Northern Cheyenne accounts develops an organic consistency aided by Monnett's cross-examinations and corroborations.

The mystery surrounding the roles of Red Cloud and Crazy Horse in the Fetterman Fight become a critical subject of inquiry for Monnett. The Fetterman Fight took place in the middle of Red Cloud's War (1866-1868), a broader series of armed conflicts between the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho alliance against the U.S. government on the Northern Plains. In Plains Indian historiography and popular memory, Red Cloud and Crazy Horse are some of the most familiar figures, but their exact roles in the Fetterman Fight seemed to be at a historical impasse. In the Oglala Lakota testimonies, most interviews attest Red Cloud's presence at the battle, whereas the Minneconjou Lakota and Northern Cheyenne accounts claim that he was absent. As for Crazy Horse, the accounts provided by Eagle Hawk, American Horse, and Rocky Bear all testify to his presence near the battle site (85). Monnett clarifies that although Red Cloud's and Crazy Horse's positions cannot be fully confirmed, it is likely that they participated in some way. What is most significant, Monnett concludes, is the iconic value of Red Cloud and Crazy Horse as leaders in the resistance against U.S. settler colonialism.

While these speculations about Red Cloud and Crazy Horse are plausible, one wishes that Monnett further explained the consequences of their representations in the secondary literature. As Monnett himself proclaims, the Fetterman Fight had an alliance of at least 1500 Native warriors defending their families, communities, and livelihood. Perhaps another interpretation of the disparities regarding Red Cloud and Crazy Horse might suggest that the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho peoples represented in this history understood their alliance to be predicated on collective agency. Joseph White Bull and others noted the democratized nature of this alliance, with all participants having personal and communal reasons to participate in the battle. As Monnett's argument in *Eyewitness to the Fetterman Fight* encourages, the traditional narratives of such events must be reassessed to acknowledge those whose voices lack representation. It will be up to the younger generation of ethnohistorians to answer these intriguing considerations Monnett presents.

John H. Monnett's thoughtfully crafted assembly of Native voices adds an untold dimension of the Fetterman Fight and reminds readers of the necessity of Indigenous agency in historical production. For the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors in the battle, the trivial details of the battle were not as important as the main objectives of their fight: securing their communities and defending the Powder River Country. Monnett's fifteen-year commitment to the study of the Fetterman Fight culminates with *Eyewitness to the Fetterman Fight*, which engages students and scholars of ethnohistory to reimagine both the narrative and the craft.

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