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**ASYMMETRICAL WARFARE ON THE GREAT PLAINS,
A REVIEW OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN WARS – 1865 - 1891**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The American Indian policy, formulated at the turn of the 19th century, significantly impacted the national military strategy. President Jefferson's plan for Indian removal became the cornerstone for federal policy. Congress would bear the responsibility for crafting the nation's Indian policies, but the burden for execution was left to an unprepared and undermanned Army.

From the end of the Civil War to the beginning of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the principal mission of the Army was fighting Indians. Returning to the Western frontier the Army attempted to fight the Indians using the tactics that proved successful in the Civil War. The diverse Great Plains tribes, using raids and ambushes, successfully fought a thirty-year war against a superior military force. It would finally take the unorthodox tactics of several field commanders to bring an end to the fighting.

This paper examines the national policy and the means used to implement it. The paper examines asymmetrical warfare through its discussion on critical shortcomings in military preparedness and strategy. The past several conflicts that U.S. military forces have participated in (Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan) suggest that the American Indian Wars offer valuable strategic lessons.

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ASYMMETRICAL WARFARE ON THE GREAT PLAINS, A REVIEW OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN WARS--1865-1891

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.

--Carl von Clausewitz ¹

PURPOSE

The darkened silence is broken by the image of a cavalry unit's guidon flapping in the wind and a narrator's voice telling of the defeat of Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry Regiment at the Battle of Little Bighorn. The next scene shows mounted Indian warriors gathering to head out on the warpath against the white man, and finally concludes with two cavalry troopers pursuing a runaway stagecoach. Once stopped, the troopers discover the body of the dead army paymaster and the shaft of an Indian's arrow stuck in the wagon. The trooper, staring at the arrow, pessimistically states that it appears pay is not coming for another three months. This opening scenario from John Ford's movie "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" begins the fictitious tale of a crusty old cavalry officer, portrayed by John Wayne, at the end of his career and his last fight against the Indians before his retirement from Army service. This movie, along with so many other Hollywood portrayals of American Indians as bloodthirsty savages, perpetuates the image we have of the Indians that fought against the white man in the old Southwest, doing little justice to actual historical truth. What is the truth? How did inferior Indian tribes fight such an effective war against a technologically advanced Army? How did the national policy dealing with the Indian tribes influence the Army's military strategy? How did the Army finally defeat the Indians? The answers to these questions may possibly provide some doctrinal application relevant to the type of warfare the United States anticipates it may likely face in future conflicts.

Soon after the concerted terrorist attack against America on 11 September 2001, President George W. Bush spoke to the American people telling them that they needed to be prepared to fight a long and costly war against terrorism. He told them that this would be like no other war fought by America's sons and daughters, and that the enemy would be evasive, elusive, and that victory would not be easy to define:

This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war

above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat. Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. ²

It is unlikely that the scenes from this war on terrorism, flashed on television screens in America's homes by the various news organizations, will be similar to the horrid images of wounded and dying American soldiers seen during the Vietnam War or endless lines of enemy prisoners of Operation Desert Storm. The scenes will probably not look like the black and white film clips of World War II and Korea. What will they look like? The grotesque image of the dead soldier being dragged through the street in Somalia or mass genocide like that in Rwanda might provide a small glimpse of the type of warfare we, as a nation and an Army, may be called upon to fight in the 21st century. Could the President have related the nation's impending war against terrorism to the battles and campaigns fought against the American Indians in the last half of the nineteenth century? To describe the war on terrorism he could have possibly used a scene from a John Ford movie showing a gallant cavalry charge chasing off attacking Indian warriors, only to have the same warriors attack and kill civilians on a stagecoach later in the movie. Could Hollywood films resemble the live action news clips we may see in future conflicts—the war on terrorism, peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, or Africa? This paper examines the United States' policy concerning the American Indians and the political and military means used to implement the policy during the latter half of the 19th century. It discusses the Indian warrior as a guerilla fighter, using asymmetrical warfare against the unprepared frontier Army. Asymmetrical warfare is defined as "battles between dissimilar forces. These battles can be extremely lethal, especially if the force being attacked is not ready to defend itself against the threat."³ Lastly, this paper highlights the critical importance of the development of viable national political and military strategies for conducting military operations of asymmetrical characteristics, similar to those envisioned by President Bush and his war on terrorism.

The mind-set of war must change. It is a different type of battle. It's a different type of battlefield. It's a different type of war. And that, in itself, is going to be a real challenge for America and those other nations who understand that, because sometimes -- look, the mission is to root out terrorist activities. And there's a variety of ways in which that can happen. Clearly, one of our focuses is to get people out of their caves, smoke them out, get them moving and get them -- is about as plainly as I can put it. ⁴

UNITED STATES INDIAN POLICY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

In 1801, President Thomas Jefferson became the third president of a young American nation, whose boundaries stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River and from

the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, with a population of approximately five million people. Even with the vastness of this new republic, consisting of approximately one thousand square miles, two-thirds of the nation's five million people lived within fifty miles of tidewater.⁵ Because of the political turmoil taking place on the European continent, the Louisiana Territory, the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, was available for purchase from France. President Jefferson understood the political, social, and economical importance of expanding the western boundaries of America. Great interest in the exploration and development of this land was shared with Spain, France, England, and Russia. Most important, however, was the fact that this land was already in the possession of scores of Indian tribes that were determined to hold on to it.⁶ This dilemma provided Thomas Jefferson and his successors with a vexing political problem. From the day President Jefferson commissioned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to commence the exploration of a western route to the Pacific Ocean, he would be faced with the development and implementation of a national policy dealing with the many Indian tribes that inhabited the lands west of the Mississippi River.

President Jefferson's land expansion policies did not provide the envisioned geographical benefits to everyone. Neither black slaves nor Indians had much of a role, and each group was subjected to different forms of unequal treatment. Jefferson thought differently of Indians than he did of the slaves. He considered Indians to be savages, but was not convinced that they were biologically inferior to the white race. Therefore, the basic essence of Jeffersonian Indian policy was coexistence with the white race through the transforming process of civilization, culminating in their actual intermarrying into the dominant Anglo-American society.⁷ Jefferson believed that "civilization would bring peace" between Indians and settlers. Under his leadership the national government placed its "greatest hope in its policy of bringing civilization to the Indians." Jefferson constantly urged tribal leaders to change their lifestyle in order to require less land for their people. Jeffersonian Indian policy fitted well with the growing land needs of Anglo-American pioneers. The policy accepted the inevitability of the pioneers' advance across the frontier with the federal government maintaining firm, though regularly changing, boundaries through an orderly, managed progression of settlements made possible by periodic land openings.⁸ Despite President Jefferson's strong commitment to Indian civilization, his proposed program to domesticate the Indians was never successful. Congress, and other government senior officials, refused to sufficiently support it, fiscally or politically. "Cynical politicians regarded the nation's 'Indian problem' as solvable through the steady advance of hardy American pioneers; in due time extermination rather than assimilation would rid the nation of this vexing complication to its expansion, growth, and development."⁹ The

policy of his immediate successors—James Madison, James Monroe, and John Quincy Adams—carried over in varying degrees the Jeffersonian style of managing the Indian tribes. Gradually, however, removal and segregation by exile into the trans-Mississippi wilderness eclipsed coexistence and assimilation as cornerstones of federal management of the eastern tribes.¹⁰

Following the War of 1812 there occurred a phenomenal burst of Anglo-American settlement and development in the Old Northwest, Old Southwest, and Mississippi Valley. The region's ultimate destiny, however, according to local politicians was retarded by the continuing presence of Indian nations who occupied choice lands. Moreover, with the admission of more and more states to the Union, the power of the West in national political affairs was growing. The region's ever-larger delegation of congressmen and senators was unanimously committed to exiling resident tribes into the trans-Mississippi region.¹¹ This strong sentiment of racism and deprivation against the Indian would cause the postwar Congress to adopt tribal removal as the United States Government's unofficial Indian policy. Removal was made a basic tenet of most treaties signed between the government and the Indian tribes, and the first major removal treaty was signed by the Delaware tribe in 1818. In the Southeast, the Choctaw and Creek signed removal treaties in 1820 and 1821 respectively.¹² By 1830, this policy of tribal removal became the Federal Government's official policy when Congress signed the Indian Removal Act, delegating President Andrew Jackson authority to set up districts within the western Indian Territory for Eastern peoples who agreed to relocate. During his frontier career, Andrew Jackson and his soldiers had slain thousands of Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles, however, these southern Indians were still numerous and clung stubbornly to their tribal lands, which had been assigned to them forever by white men's treaties. In his first message to Congress, President Jackson recommended that all these Indians be removed westward beyond the Mississippi River. Although enactment of such a law would only add to the long list of broken promises made to the eastern Indians, Andrew Jackson was convinced that Indians and whites could not live together in peace and that his plan would make possible a final promise that would never be broken again.¹³ The act also provided indemnities to the Indians for assistance in moving and for protection. Entire tribes were forced to resettle, and several wars resulted when Native Americans refused to accept resettlement.¹⁴

The period between 1830 through 1860 brought little change to the government's policy of Indian relocation. Beginning in 1849 and lasting through the 1860's, mining would dominate the scene with thousands of new settlers rushing westward to strike it rich in the newly discovered silver and gold mines in areas of California, Colorado, Nevada, and Montana.¹⁵

However, by 1850 the period of Indian removal was for the most part over, with only scattered groups of Indians remaining east of the Mississippi River. West of the river, the Federal Government organized a reservation system to separate white settlers and Indians. It was inevitable that the uncontrolled rush of fortune-seekers would create the conditions for conflict with the Indians.

The period between 1860-1890 was an incredible era of violence, civil war, greed, audacity, sentimentality, undirected exuberance, and an almost reverential attitude toward the ideal of personal freedom for those who already had it. During this time the culture and civilization of the American Indian was destroyed, and out of that time came virtually all the great myths of the American West.¹⁶

The rush of settlers across the Plains in search of gold and silver brought them into conflict with the Indians, as they repeatedly encroached on Indian lands. In an effort to head off trouble, the government negotiated the Treaty of Fort Laramie with Indian leaders, in which Indian Territory was defined and the tribes agreed to refrain from hostile acts against the settlers. It was not long before this treaty was broken by the government who reneged on agreed upon payments, by the settlers who refused to recognize Indian Territory, and by the Indians who did not always agree with their leaders.¹⁷

By 1875 the United States Government's Indian policy was turning toward concentration of tribes either in Indian Territory or on large regional reservations.¹⁸ For the next forty years, the Federal Executive Branch implemented the reservation policy as ruthlessly as Andrew Jackson had implemented the removal policy.¹⁹

The central government under the Articles of Confederation and the new constitution hoped to convince Indians to follow standards of behavior acceptable to white Americans. To most leaders these altruistic motives did not seem inconsistent with the more tangible goal of securing title to tribal lands...Few recognized the contradictions inherent in this position or admitted that racism would prevent the proper execution of all but the most careful plans.²⁰

Up to the time of the Civil War the national policy was to move the various tribes to those areas of the west that were deemed uninhabitable by whites. Government treaties would allocate land, government assistance, and military support to the tribes as they relocated to designated reservations. Following the Civil War, national policy shifted away from peaceful relocation to armed containment due to the government's inability, or unwillingness, to honor its treaties. Additionally, the discovery of precious metals and the introduction of additional rail lines into the Great Plains created the conditions for armed rebellion by dissatisfied Indians. As more and more people settled into the territory of the Great Plains, Indian land rights were violated more frequently, often leading to the death of both Indians and white settlers. How the

government dealt with this intrusion would become the stage for the Indian Wars fought between 1865 through 1891.²¹

ENFORCING THE POLICY

The elements affecting national Indian policy during the 19th century were much more complex than is generally acknowledged. "It has been the settled policy of the government," wrote the Secretary of the Interior in 1866, "to establish the various tribes upon suitable reservations and there protect and subsist them until they can be taught to cultivate the soil and sustain themselves." This goal, of course, was actually only a means to a larger goal: to remove the Indians from the paths of westward expansion and--a consoling legalism--to extinguish Indian "title" to lands on which whites wanted to settle.²²

The importance of post-1865 politics in the formulation of the army's Indian policy is also clear. Although the politicians and issues of Reconstruction and the Gilded Age deserve serious attention, few individuals of national prominence cared a great deal about Indian affairs. Few, whatever their honesty, possessed qualifications for the difficult task of dealing with Indians.²³

While the goals of subjugation, removal, and acculturation remained constant, the means by which they were to be achieved differed markedly throughout the last half of the century.²⁴

The means to implement the government's policy were the organizations given the responsibility to handle Indian affairs. These organizations of course were the Office of Indian Affairs and the Regular Army. In 1832 the Office of Commissioner of Indian Affairs was created in the War Department shortly after a motley group of untrained militia attacked and killed a small force of Indians attempting to move back into Illinois. This office would prove inept in handling the growing problem due to the turnover of personnel and the general lack of interest in the Indian problem. "The Secretaries of War, with the exceptions of Calhoun, Davis, and perhaps Poinsett, were themselves men of indifferent abilities. Their advisors frequently had similar shortcomings. Even such able generals as Winfield Scott found power struggles and personality clashes within the army more absorbing than the elaboration and execution of the Indian policy."²⁵ In 1849 the office was renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs and transferred to the newly created Department of the Interior, which was to be customarily dominated by westerners less sympathetic to the Indians than the War Department. Presenting attractive opportunities for profiteering at Indian expense, the Bureau of Indian Affairs became badly tainted by corruption and a victim of patronage politics. The combination of different opinions, civilian input into military policy, lack of interest in the Indian problem exacerbated the problem of formulating a consistent policy.²⁶ Moreover, the task for Indian removal remained the

responsibility of the War Department. This division of labor caused a great many problems, most notably, the violation of the principle of unity of command. The problem became so bad that on several occasions various members of Congress attempted to get the Bureau of Indian Affairs returned to the War Department. However, distrust of the military and hints of corruption would prevent the transfer from taking place.

More important, however, was the impact the Chief Executive had on policy enforcement. "Although presidents and certain administrative officials contributed to military decision-making, their attitudes were based less on actual experience than on common misconceptions of Indians."²⁷ President Andrew Johnson, for example, expressed little interests in the subject of Indian affairs, while President Grant would surprise both civilian leaders and the Army with his "Quaker" peace policy. These men like those that had come before, had profound impact on the way the military developed its strategy to deal with Indian removal. Lastly, the military leaders in the War Department and the various Military Districts would impact significantly on policy enforcement. Inevitably, Congress bore the responsibility for crafting the nation's eighteenth and nineteenth century Indian policies; but no branch of the federal government had a greater hand in the implementation of those policies than the United States Army. A wide variety of issues, including politics, perceptions of the western environment, railroad building, international relations, clashes between the War and Interior Departments, personal disputes, and misconceptions among the whites about Native Americans all influenced the military's operations against Indians after 1865.

John Keegan wrote in Fields of Battle, his book about the history of wars for North America, that the American Great Plains began as "an empty land, empty, that is, of anything but buffalo and Indians."²⁸ He would go on to state that it was the introduction of the horse on the Plains that "initiated the Indians opening to the outside world, transformed their venerable culture, and imposed a unity on the vast region not possible of attainment during the millennia when movement by foot, on the trail of the herds, was the only means of traversing its vast distances."

²⁹ Early explorers and adventurers would call it the "Great American Desert," causing many of the prominent national leaders to deem it uninhabitable by Anglo-Americans. As white settlers discovered the beauty and the treasures that the Great Plains held, and began the expansion of the continent westward, the Frontier Army would be called upon more and more to bring peace to the West. This increasing demand confirmed the Frontier Army's primary problems stemmed from the wide disparity of Indian groups it dealt with, the vast distances and expanding boundaries it was supposed to guard, and a Congress and citizenry reluctant to increase military spending.³⁰

THE RED WARRIOR

The Indians had been fighting with and against the white man since the first immigrants settled on the North American continent. Colonial warfare and expanding white population had for the most part pacified the eastern tribes. The government policies toward the tribes that remained in the east would provide the setting for the remainder of the century. As tribes were moved west of the Mississippi River, the Army's interaction would grow fiercer. By no means were all the tribes that inhabited the West enemies of the Army. For the most part, intermittent warfare had reduced the number of tribes that stood in the way of westward expansion. "It was the subjugation of the few unconquered {Indian} tribes that opened this period, but they did not go gently to their deaths."³¹

In 1866 only a handful of tribes retained the power and will to contest the westward movement. On the Great Plains there were the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and Comanche. In the Rocky Mountains there were the Nez Perce, Ute, and Bannock. In the Northwest were the Paiute and Modoc, while in the Southwest were the Apache. Totaling less than one hundred thousand people, these "hostile" Indians engaged the United States in the final struggle for the American West.³² Prior to this time, however, the Regular Army would find itself fighting in the East in the struggle to save the nation. "Indian power and confidence would grow during this period of absence, even the most peaceful tribes or bands of Indians would contribute warriors to the many war parties that preyed on the stagecoaches, the wagon trains, and the homesteads for prisoners and plunder. Murder, robbery, torture, kidnapping, and gang rape became commonplace on the frontier, and each depredation was followed by a cry for military intervention."³³

As previously stated, Indian warriors fought with and against the white man since the first white settler stepped ashore on the North American continent. The Indian fought primarily for honor among his tribe, for pillage and revenge, and to defend his home and family against his enemy.

Exalting war, Indian culture produced a superb warrior. From childhood he received intensive training and indoctrination. Courage, physical strength and endurance, stealth, cunning horsemanship, and mastery of bow and arrow, lance, and knife marked his fighting qualities. As firearms became more numerous and available, the warrior became more adept at its use, giving him an advantage not possessed by the Indians in the pre-Civil War years. He excelled at guerilla warfare-at hit and run raids, at harassment, at exploitation of the environment for his own advantage and the enemy's disadvantage. Except when surprised or protecting his home, the Indian fought only on his terms, when success seemed certain. Man for man, the Indian warrior far surpassed his blue-clad adversary in virtually every test of military proficiency.³⁴

It would be the Indian's superb use of guerilla tactics, and the Army's failure to develop a strategy to fight this type of war that would prolong the war against the various tribes. "The Indians themselves presented special challenges to the conventional Army. Each tribe had its own cultural standards, beliefs, war fighting styles and geographical advantages."³⁵ In the arid Southwest were the Apaches, veterans of 250 years of partisan warfare with the Spaniards, who taught them the finer arts of torture and mutilation but never subdued them. In the far West most of the tribes were too small, too divided, or too weak to offer much resistance. The Modocs of northern California and southern Oregon numbering less than a thousand also fought guerilla-fashion for their lands.³⁶ In dealing with the differences of the various tribes, the Army found itself having a lot of difficulty distinguishing between hostile Indians and those that were friendly since the Indian village could contain both.³⁷ This same phenomenon would be repeated almost a century later in the hamlets and villages of South Vietnam.

The Indian Bureau was the agency tasked to act on the Government's behalf. It was the one place the Indian or the white settler could go to settle disputes. It failed in this mission during the latter half of the century, mainly because of corruption and ineptitude on the part of its leaders. Behind the bureau stood the United States Army. Its lack of understanding about the culture of the various Indian tribes and its failure to apply an adequate strategy would lead to a prolonged campaign against each warring tribe.

THE REGULAR ARMY

The regular army was almost wholly a creature of the frontier. Frontier needs prompted creation of the regular army. Except for two foreign wars and one civil war, frontier needs fixed the principal mission and employment of the regular army for a century. Frontier needs dictated the periodic enlargements of the regular army in the nineteenth century. For a century the regulars worked the frontier West. They explored and mapped it. They laid out roads and telegraph lines, and aided significantly in the advance of the railroads. They campaigned against Indians. They guarded travel routes and protected settlers. By offering security or the appearance of it, together with a market for labor and produce, they encouraged further settlement.³⁸

It would be the renewed exploration of the Great Plains by the new emigrants and various government agencies, as well as, the national policy of relocation that existed throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century that would give credibility to the Regular Army. From the moment the government instituted its policy of relocation the primary means of protection against the Indian raids and attacks in protest of the relocation policy, were soldiers garrisoned in a series of military posts that ran southward from Fort Snelling on the upper Mississippi River to Forts Atkinson and Leavenworth on the Missouri, Forts Gibson and Smith on the Arkansas,

Fort Towson on the Red, and Fort Jesup in Louisiana to keep the Indians beyond the 95th meridian and to prevent unauthorized white men from crossing it.³⁹ Gregory Urwin described the growth of the Indians on the Great Plains in his historical account of the United States Cavalry,

In 1846 the American land mass had been fairly well defined; less than a dozen forts were adequate to provide a satisfactory level of security. With the accession of the Oregon Territory and the Mexican Cession, the nation's size ballooned by a third. America received 400,000 new people requiring protection, and her Indian population was augmented by some 200,000 souls. America's soldiers were now assigned the arduous task of subduing some of the most cunning and formidable tribes on the continent—the Apaches, Navajos, Comanches, Kiowas, Yakimas, Spokanes, Utes and many more.⁴⁰

It was inevitable that the settlers in their wild rush to claim land and search for newfound gold and silver would trespass on the land set aside by treaties for displaced tribes. In addition, the unrestrained slaughter of buffalo for its hide and the devastation of natural resources that sustained the Indian tribes brought great resentment of the white man. "What had largely been a comfortable garrison army was transformed overnight into a harried and overextended constabulary that was frequently pulled in two or more directions at once. Between 1848 and 1861, regular troops were called out to quell twenty-two separate Indian wars, and they took part in 206 individual engagements."⁴¹ The problem of increased deployments would be exacerbated by an increase in the Army's area of responsibility, almost doubling in size to 200,000 square miles, and their frontier posts expanding from eight to fifty-two. Worse yet, Congress would not see fit to expand the Army's personnel strength to handle the responsibility of its expanded missions. "Under such impoverished, shorthanded conditions, American cavalymen were forced to pursue a basically defensive strategy. Small patrols were sent out continuously to prevent marauding Indians from infiltrating into settled or semi-settled areas, but they were not much of a deterrent."⁴²

By the mid-1850's the Army came to realize that the defensive policy it had adapted was doing little to stop the Indian raids. They would begin to advocate a more offensive policy that saw more severe retribution being taken out against entire tribes vice isolated hunting parties.

After a massacre of thirty soldiers of the Sixth Infantry Regiment by a small band of Brule Sioux near Fort Laramie, Wyoming on 19 August 1855, Brevet Brigadier General William Harney, stating to those who asked for leniency for the Indians, "By God, I'm for battle – no peace," would lead a 600-man expedition from Fort Kearney against a band of 250 defiant Brules. The skirmish left eighty-five warriors dead, five wounded, and seventy squaws and children captured.⁴³

This attack so unnerved the Teton Sioux that they would remain at peace for the next ten years. The Army continued to pursue the Indians in this manner gaining the unconditional surrender of the bands they defeated. The experience gained by the frontier Army in their battles against the Indians in the West would be temporarily shelved as operations slackened during the Civil War. While the regular soldiers were away fighting on the battlefields in the East, the Great Plains exploded with a series of battles, creating the need for nearly 20,000 volunteers from various states in the Midwest, West, and Southwest to be recruited for home defense. These citizen soldiers subdued some of the warring tribes, but their operations stirred up many others. The regular Army returning after the Civil War in 1866 "inherited a Great Plains and Southwest rife with hate and violence."⁴⁴

At the end of the Civil War, most of the weary veterans returned to civilian life; however, a few soldiers remained in the Regular Army that returned to the Great Plains to face a far different military situation than that which existed in the pre-Civil War period.⁴⁵ It was this period immediately following the Civil War to the beginning of the Spanish-American War that the Army's primary military objective was fighting Indians. However, the Army found itself stretched to its limits trying to accomplish the additional tasks of patrolling the Mexican border, dealing with natural disasters, assisting in the reconstruction of the South, and escorting settlers West. Relief would come in July 1866, when President Andrew Johnson signed legislation to increase and fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States. "In the army line, the law increased the cavalry from six to ten regiments and the infantry from nineteen to forty-five regiments. The artillery remained at five regiments. Enlistments were set at five years for the cavalry, three for the infantry. Up to one thousand Indian scouts were authorized as needed for the frontier."⁴⁶ Many believed this force would be detailed to the western frontier as the regulars had before the war. Instead, approximately forty percent of the Army found itself as an occupation force in the South; as late as 1876, 15 percent of the regular Army remained in the region.⁴⁷ However, it was the United States Congress that had the greatest strategic impact on the army's ability to pursue the president's policy against the Indian. Despite the Army's expanded roles, Congress found little need to support a large standing army and began a series of deep cuts. "The Army appropriations Act of March 3, 1869, cut the number of infantry regiments from forty-five to twenty-five. The act reduced the Army from 54,000 men to an end strength of 37,313."⁴⁸ The Army of this period was severely underfunded and the quality of soldiers that were mustered out of the Army after Appomattox was almost non-existent by the 1870's.

At the end of the Civil War the Army reorganized under a new system of geographical commands to perform their assigned missions; Indian relocation was one of many considerations determining the divisions. "There were no special Indian divisions, although some departments were organized to deal with threats that a particular tribe or group of tribes may pose."⁴⁹ The West was divided into two divisions—the Division of the Missouri, commanded by Lieutenant General William T. Sherman, and the Division of the Pacific, commanded by Major General Henry W. Halleck. Each of the divisions was sub-divided into military departments. It was the department commanders that proved to be the key to the Frontier Army's chain of command, setting the standards of performance of the soldiers assigned to the various outposts. The large measure of autonomy permitted department commanders was a source of strength in localized Indian troubles; however, commanders had problems with cooperation and coordination when trouble spilled across departmental boundaries. To avoid this problem, boundaries were often redrawn.⁵⁰ Beyond these deficiencies, however, lay a more fundamental question. Throughout the debates over size, composition, and command of the peacetime army, apparently no one thought to ask whether traditional organizations truly fitted the special conditions of the Army's mission in the West.⁵¹ The Army that would form after the Civil War was a second-rate replica of the force that defeated the well-armed Confederate Army after four long years of warfare.

The enlisted complement was mediocre at best. The Army offered few incentives to attract recruits of high caliber. Pay ranged from thirteen dollars a month for privates to twenty-two dollars for line sergeants. Gone were the legions of fresh young men fired by a sense of mission to save the Union. The *New York Sun* charged that the Army is composed of bummers, loafers, and foreign paupers. But the paper was only partially correct as the ranks also harbored criminals and drunkards as well.⁵²

The Frontier Army was undertrained, underpaid, and recruited mostly from the country's unskilled poor. Most soldiers were taken from the emigrants that traveled West after failing to find employment in the East. Nearly half of the recruits following the Civil War were foreign-born; approximately 20 percent were Irish and 12 percent from Germany. As a general rule, many of these were illiterate and were dirt poor. Having to master both the English language and soldier skills posed a significant burden for their unit leadership.⁵³ Large numbers of newly freed blacks were also enlisted and formed into four regiments—two cavalry and two infantry. These black soldiers would become known as Buffalo Soldiers by the Plains Indians, and would distinguish themselves in the campaigns against the Apaches and Sioux. Disciplinary problems were handled with stern punishment, including the lash. For the most part, the soldiers received few rewards for good conduct, food was poor, quarters cramped, forts isolated from populated

areas, and pay was often late. It was only a strong sense of duty or fear that kept the soldier in the Army during this time. A third of the total enlisted force would desert between 1867 and 1891.⁵⁴

For the most part the officer corps was primarily filled with veterans of the Civil War. As the years went by, vacancies were customarily filled with professionals trained at West Point. The downsizing of the Army after the Civil War saw many officers reduced in rank from that held during the Civil War, such as the case of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer (Brevet Major General in 1865).

The extent of bickering among officers in the postwar Army was phenomenal. The officers had a right to be unhappy. Their responsibilities were heavier than they should have been, because commands were chronically understaffed. Seasoned hands were constantly being called back to departmental, divisional, or national headquarters for staff work. Lieutenant Colonel George Custer rode to his last battle with fifteen of his forty-six officers absent on detached service.⁵⁵

Despite the problems, the officer corps was proficient in the conduct of conventional warfare after four years of combat in the Civil War. However, these same professionals were woefully ill-trained and unprepared to fight a protracted guerilla war on the open fields against an elusive foe that rarely stood to fight a set piece battle.⁵⁶ "The Army had followed the Indian frontier over the Appalachian Mountains, across the prairies and woodlands of the continent's heartland, and finally to the plains, mountains, and deserts of the trans-Mississippi West. Now the Army prepared to play its part in the final extinction of the Indian's freedom."⁵⁷

THE CAMPAIGNS⁵⁸

Comanches, 1867-1875. Major General Philip Sheridan, commander of the Department of the Missouri, instituted a winter campaign in 1868 as a means of locating the elusive Indian bands of the region.

Modocs, 1872-1873. The Bloc Campaign of 1872-1873 was the last Indian war of consequence on the Pacific Coast. Led by a chief known as "Captain Jack," a majority of the tribe returned to their homeland. After several failed attempts to attack the renegades, Brigadier General Canby, commander of the Department of the Pacific, led a force of 1,000 men against the Indian fortifications. While attempting to talk with the chief under a flag of truce, Brigadier General Canby and one civilian commissioner were killed when "Captain Jack" violated the truce. Brigadier General Jeff Davis would take Canby's place and lead a sustained attack against the Modocs, capturing and removing them to the Indian Territory.

Apaches, 1873 and 1885-1886. Brigadier General George Crook, commander of the Department of Arizona, undertook a series of winter campaigns by small detachments that pacified the area by 1874. Dissatisfaction with the Indian Bureau's policy of removal, dissident elements left the reservations, and led by Chato, Victorio, Geronimo, and other chiefs, raided settlements along both sides of the border. Victorio was killed in 1880 by Mexican troops; however, Geronimo and Chato remained at large until their capture in 1883 when they surrendered to Brigadier General Crook, who had been reinforced by Apache scouts. Geronimo would continue to leave the reservation to conduct terrorist attacks against the white settlements in the area. Finally, in 1886, Geronimo and his band would surrender to Brigadier General Miles and be sent to Florida, and later to Fort Sill military reservation.

Yellowstone Campaign, 1876-1877. Dissatisfaction with miners trespassing on tribal land and the extension of the railroad into the area caused many of the Indians to leave their reservations. Columns of approximately 2,450 troopers departed Forts Fetterman in Wyoming, Lincoln in North Dakota, and Ellis in Wyoming to trap the Indians in the vicinity of the Yellowstone River and return them to their reservation. After several unsuccessful engagements with large bands of Sioux and Cheyenne, Brigadier General Crook retreated to the Tongue River to await reinforcements. Brigadier General Terry had also found the trail of the same Indian band, dispatching the 7th Cavalry Regiment under Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer to find the Indian war party and move south of it. General Terry would then join with Colonel Gibbon and move north of the tribe. Custer discovered the camp of 4,000 to 5,000 warriors and ordered an attack. Custer unwisely divided the regiment into three parts and he and his force of 211 were surrounded and killed. After this debacle, the campaign would continue with Brigadier Generals Terry and Crook fighting several skirmishes and raids against the elusive Indians. By the summer of 1877, most of the Sioux had returned to the reservations. Sitting Bull and his small band would finally surrender in 1881.

Nez Perce, 1877. The Nez Perce, led by Chief Joseph, refused to give up their ancestral lands along the Idaho-Oregon border and enter a reservation. When settlers were killed after negotiations broke down, the Army was called in to force them to settle on the reservation. Chief Joseph chose to resist and led his tribe on an epic retreat of some 1,600 miles through Idaho, Yellowstone Park, and Montana during which he engaged in thirteen battles and skirmishes in a period of eleven weeks. Chief Joseph would finally capitulate in September 1877.

Bannocks, 1878. The Bannocks, Paiute and other tribes of southern Idaho left their reservations because of dissatisfaction with government land allocations. By July, most had

returned to the reservations; however, small bands continued to raid ranches and mines until September 1879, when they finally surrendered.

Cheyennes, 1878-1879. A small band of approximately 89 warriors and 250 women and children escaped from the Indian Territory in September 1877. They eluded the Army and continued north raiding settlements for stock and plunder. After a short fight, in which Colonel Lewis was mortally wounded, the band escaped again and continued north hoping to link up with the Cheyennes at Fort Keogh, Montana or with Sitting Bull in Canada. After several more fights with the various Army units, the remaining renegades surrendered and were marched to Fort Keogh.

Utes, September 1879-November 1880. An Indian agent in Colorado became involved in a dispute with the Utes in September 1879 and requested assistance from the Army. On 29 September a force of 200 soldiers was attacked and besieged by 300 to 400 warriors. By the time that the small Army force was relieved by more soldiers on 5 October, the Indian agent and his staff had been massacred. Before the Utes were pacified in November 1880, several thousand soldiers would be used to gain their surrender.

Pine Ridge, November 1890-January 1891. Accumulated grievances, aggravated by the teachings of Indian prophet Wovoka, brought about this last major conflict with the Sioux. General Miles, commander of the Department of the Missouri, responded to a Department of Interior request to check the increasing antagonism by arresting the Sioux leader, Sitting Bull. Sitting Bull would be killed during the attempted arrest. Meanwhile large numbers of Sioux had assembled in the Badlands where a serious clash took place at Wounded Knee Creek in December 1890. In January 1891 the remaining warriors were finally disarmed and persuaded to return to the their reservations.

Wounded Knee would be the last major conflict with the Indian tribes that occupied the Great Plains. The Army and law enforcement officials would conduct several minor skirmishes for the remaining years of the 19th century; however, these battles were against small bands of renegade Indians who had broken the law. By 1891, the Indians had been pacified and, for the most part, pacified on the designated Indian reservations.

THE LESSONS OF WAR

The lack of a firm published doctrine and common tactics to guide the military leadership in the employment of the Army as a peace enforcer with the native tribes had severe negative consequences for the Army and government Indian policy. As one Kansas settler would satirically observe, talk about regulars hunting Indians! They go out, and when night comes, they blow the bugle to let the Indians know they are going to sleep. In the morning, they

blow the bugle to let the Indian know they are getting up. Between their bugles and their great trains, they manage to keep the Indians out of sight.⁵⁹

One might assume that the Government and the Army would have fared better against the Indians, given their experiences of the Civil War. However, it would be an inconsistent national policy and a weak national military strategy employed against the small number of warring Indian tribes that caused the United States to fight a thirty-year war to subdue them. "A century of Indian warfare, extending a record of such conflict that reached well back into colonial times, should have taught us much about dealing with people who do not fight in conventional ways, and our military traditions might reasonably have been expected to reflect the lessons thus learned. Some were not without relevance in Vietnam."⁶⁰

With the appointment of Elihu Root as Secretary of War in 1899, reform of the Army would become paramount for the nation's civilian leadership. Two of the most significant reforms instituted by Secretary Root would be the creation of the General Staff, responsive to the Secretary for manning, equipping, and training the Army, as well as strategic military planning for future. The second reform would be the establishment of the Army War College, where student officers would study large-scale operations.⁶¹ These reforms, along with many others, would not solve all the problems of the Army but would provide a systematic approach to better trained and educated professionals for the future.

Many older men claimed that books and military education could add little to one's abilities and that actual combat and field service provided the only means by which one could learn about war...Not surprisingly, officers remained largely unaware of international developments in military structure and theory...the majority of senior Army officers, perceiving the Indian Wars as less important than possible confrontations with European foes, failed to study the contemporary colonial wars. Had they done so, they might have recognized a number of similarities between the respective conflicts, noting and perhaps profiting from the successes and failures of other European nations in fighting against nomadic and tribal peoples.⁶²

The lessons learned about asymmetrical warfare from the Army's campaigns against the American Indians have been revisited throughout the conflicts of the twentieth century, and could very well be appropriate for future warfare. As President Bush stated in his speech after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, "It's a different type of battle. It's a different type of war." It is quite possible that the most notable lesson taken away from the American Indian Wars is the lesson of fighting an irregular force in guerilla-style warfare. As stated above, the Army and the United States were not prepared to conduct these types of asymmetrical engagements despite the previous century of warfare.

Neither Army doctrine nor the West Point curriculum of the period, dealt with fighting against an irregular force. Officer education focused on general leadership and basic engineering skills. The little strategic introduction that was offered tended to reinforce the practical experience and youthful republican aggressiveness and applied largely to traditional European-style warfare. In fact, in 1870 Sir Edward Bruce Hamley's text, Operations of War, which stressed classical Napoleonic warfare and strategy, was adopted as the West Point textbook on war fighting.⁶³

The United States Army's experiences in the Vietnam War, Haiti, Somalia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina would echo some of the same characteristics exhibited in the American Indian campaigns. U. S. Presidents failed to set consistent national policy toward each dissimilar conflict, and senior military leaders, who should have known better, applied strategies and tactics inappropriate for the asymmetrical engagements fought by the opposing forces. "The United States itself was no stranger to guerilla war. Our own experience during the Indian Wars, the Philippine Insurrection, and the Mexican border skirmishes were reflected in our Field Service Regulations. The 1939 edition devoted four pages to this subject, including two and one-half pages on combating guerilla warfare."⁶⁴

The mindset of both the civilian and military leadership at the time was that of a defensive war, fought from static positions. The use of forts scattered throughout the desert and the numerous trenches that surrounded the major cities in the Civil War exemplified the defensive mindset. The lack of a thorough training program and a complete lack of focus on any peace enforcement efforts had an adverse impact on the ability of the officer corps to properly employ their troops when in contact with the Indians.

In many cases, the situation did not call for warfare but merely a policing action. That is, offending individuals or groups needed to be separated from the innocent and punished. Without the proper training however, senior and junior officers alike almost always overreacted and responded to Indian challenges with the conventional warfare methodology and would punish the innocent and guilty alike.⁶⁵

It would be the innovative tactics of two Civil War veterans that would finally prove effective against the Indians. Generals John Sherman and Philip Sheridan employed the course of action of winter campaigns to deny the Indians shelter and the ability to forage amid the harsh elements. Several Secretaries of War agreed that continued offensive operations were necessary to defeat the Indians. They hoped that strong military columns dispatched into Indian lands might intimidate the tribes and bring them to the peace table. Yet, as warfare continued to plague America's frontiers, active campaigning west of the Mississippi became increasingly violent.⁶⁶ A final lesson for the Army to learn was understanding the class of fighter the Army was fighting. As a guerilla fighter the Indian warrior was well trained and disciplined. He would

only fight when the conditions were set for victory. His use of hit and run tactics would extend the Indian Wars for some three decades. This lesson also would be relearned almost a century later in the battles fought against the Viet Cong, as well as the North Vietnamese Army. Michael Walzer describes guerilla warfare in this manner: "The guerilla's self-image is not of a solitary fighter hiding among the people, but of a whole people mobilized for war, himself a loyal member, one among many. If you want to fight against us, the guerillas say, you are going to have to fight civilians, for you are not at war with an army, but with a nation. Therefore, you should not fight at all, and if you do, you are the barbarians, killing women and children."⁶⁷ This was the lesson that so many of the national leaders did not understand. This was the reason that the government's policy would have to be carried out by force by the Army. "The {guerilla} war cannot be won, and it should not be won. It cannot be won, because the only strategy involves a war against civilians; and it should not be won, because the degree of civilian support that rules out alternative strategies also makes the guerillas the legitimate rulers of the country. The struggle against them is an unjust struggle as well as one that can only be carried out unjustly."⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

Where do we go from here? As the United States engages in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan, it is prudent that military leaders relook the lessons of America's Indian Wars. A review of recent international conflicts shows that most are between different factions, political groups, and races and mainly involve third world countries. As demonstrated in the fighting in Somalia, Kosovo, and now in Afghanistan, the enemy is not going to stand and fight. He will not possess the most modern equipment; he will blend in among the civilian populace, and he will hide when the Army shows up. "Insurgency has, therefore, again become part of inter-state conflict, a form of indirect aggression made attractive by the inability of states to use conventional military power."⁶⁹ The employment of counterinsurgency tactics is why the Army must review its lessons from the American Indian wars. However, a more important lesson is one for possible future conflict with a well-armed opponent. "However orthodox the conduct of Indian wars, the frontier not only failed as a training ground for orthodox wars; it positively unfitted the army for them, as painfully evident in 1812, 1846, 1861, and 1898. Scattered across the continent in little border forts, units rarely operated or assembled for practice and instruction in more than battalion strength."⁷⁰ Our service and joint doctrine must reflect the lessons learned in the asymmetrical engagements fought against a determined, adaptable enemy in small-scale wars. Our national policy must account for the vast differences in the

societies we may encounter as globalization continues at a rapid pace in the 21st Century. If insurgency is becoming the predominate form of warfare for third world countries, American senior leaders must understand its nature. If asymmetrical warfare is to become more prevalent against the United States Army because of its technological advantages, as well as its superior training in conventional warfare, then senior leaders must understand what asymmetrical warfare is, and how it best can be defeated. This is reason alone to ensure we review the lessons taken from the Indian Wars. Finally, our training and weapons development programs must be structured to provide well-trained warriors armed with the right equipment to fight and win in an asymmetrical environment. Without this understanding of our environment, and the potential enemies it fosters, the nation is poised to repeat what have been the lessons learned from past wars.

WORD COUNT = 8,587

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