



# Columns of Vengeance: Soldiers, Sioux, and the Punitive Expeditions, 1863-1864

*Paul N. Beck*

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In summer 1862, Minnesotans found themselves fighting interconnected wars—the first against the rebellious Southern states, and the second an internal war against the Sioux. While the Civil War was more important to the future of the United States, the Dakota War of 1862 proved far more destructive to the people of Minnesota—both whites and American Indians. It led to U.S. military action against the Sioux, divided the Dakotas over whether to fight or not, and left hundreds of white settlers dead. In *Columns of Vengeance*, historian Paul N. Beck offers a reappraisal of the Punitive Expeditions of 1863 and 1864, the U.S. Army's response to the Dakota War of 1862.

Whereas previous accounts have approached the Punitive Expeditions as a military campaign of the Indian Wars, Beck argues that the expeditions were also an extension of the Civil War. The strategy and tactics reflected those of the war in the East, and Civil War operations directly affected planning and logistics in the West. Beck also examines the devastating impact the expeditions had on the various bands and tribes of the Sioux. Whites viewed the expeditions as punishment—"columns of vengeance" sent against those Dakotas who had started the war in 1862—yet the majority of the Sioux the army encountered had little or nothing to do with the earlier uprising in Minnesota.

Rather than relying only on the official records of the commanding officers involved, Beck presents a much fuller picture of the conflict by consulting the letters, diaries, and personal accounts of the common soldiers who took part in the expeditions, as well as rare personal narratives from the Dakotas. Drawing on a wealth of firsthand accounts and linking the Punitive Expeditions of 1863 and 1864 to the overall Civil War experience, *Columns of Vengeance* offers fresh insight into an important chapter in the development of U.S. military operations against the Sioux.

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