



The Red River War 1874-1875: Evidence of Operational Art and Mission Command

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Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, in the summer of 1874, sent two of his Division of the Missouri departments against the Southern Plains Indians. Large numbers of the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa tribes fled their Indian Territory reservations that summer and headed for the sanctuary of the Staked Plains and the Texas panhandle. In what became known as The Red River War of 1874, the Departments of the Missouri and Texas attacked and pursued the Indians for many months throughout the fall and winter of 1874 and 1875 until finally the remaining fugitive Indians returned to the reservations and surrendered. In what would be the largest US Army campaign against the Indians after the Civil War, Lieutenant General Sheridan and his subordinate commanders effectively planned and executed simultaneous operations which definitively ended Southern Plains Indian resistance to white expansion. This study looks at the role of the army along the frontier after the Civil War, and examines why and how the army was used against the Indians during the Red River War. It examines the planning and execution of the campaign and specifically looks at modern doctrinal concepts and if there is evidence the concepts were employed during that planning and execution. Through research of credible secondary source material and study of personal accounts of the campaigns planning and execution, this study demonstrates substantial evidence that the commanders recognized certain aspects of what are now termed operational art and mission command.

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