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## Review of *The Most Promising Young Officer: A Life of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie* By Michael D. Pierce

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work that gained the attention of his superiors. Then it was during the Civil War that the young officer demonstrated his personal courage and innovation on the battlefield, especially distinguishing himself at the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. Twice wounded and four times breveted for gallantry, this twenty-four-year-old Major General of Volunteers emerged as one of the “boy generals,” and he received General Ulysses S. Grant’s ultimate praise as “the most promising young officer in the army.”

Mackenzie’s greater reputation rested upon his subsequent military service on the Great Plains, where as commander of the 4th Cavalry he conducted numerous campaigns during the next fifteen years. Extraordinarily solicitous of his soldiers’ good will, he took the field with them and endured the privation of countless long marches. In 1873 he crossed deep into Mexico to destroy the camps of Kickapoo and Lipan Apaches at El Remolino. Three years later he participated in the massive operations on the Northern Plains to round up the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne who had defeated George Custer at Little Big Horn. Brief service against Apaches in New Mexico and Utes in Colorado rounded out that career.

But it was while stationed at Ft. Concho, Texas, that Mackenzie attained his greatest fame fighting in the Red River War of 1874-75. He inflicted a series of decisive defeats against Comanches, Kiowas, and Southern Cheyennes in the area of Palo Duro Canyon and oversaw their gradual surrender at Fort Sill. In 1883 he received command of the Department of Texas, but his health was rapidly deteriorating due to the rigors of frontier campaigning, wounds, and a growing mental instability. Death came six years later, just as some of his fellow senior officers were reaching the peaks of their careers.

Michael D. Pierce has produced a credible and nicely written interpretation of Ranald Mackenzie’s life. By focusing on the frontier years and placing this officer’s experiences

*The Most Promising Young Officer: A Life of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie.* By Michael D. Pierce. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. Preface, introduction, maps, black and white illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xiii + 288 pp. \$24.95.

As the top graduate of his 1862 West Point class, cadet Ranald Slidell Mackenzie evidenced the virtues of self-discipline and hard

within the broader context of military events, he provides the reader a good sense of time and place. Pierce also successfully utilizes the standard source materials and moves well beyond Robert G. Carter's somewhat unreliable *On the Border with Mackenzie* (1935). Unfortunately, the personal dimensions of Mackenzie's thoughts and deeds will never be fully known because he was an intensely private man who left little documentation about himself. Even his official reports tend to be cryptic

and matter-of-fact, rather than literary and reflective. Persons interested in frontier military life and the Indian wars will be rewarded by this book, and they should likewise consult a second new work for comparison—Charles M. Robinson's *Bad Hand: A Biography of Ranald S. Mackenzie* (1993).

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