

Counteroffensive In Kentucky: A Dramatic Narrative Of Opposing Armies In The

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Review

COUNTEROFFENSIVE IN KENTUCKY

A dramatic narrative of opposing armies in the

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Hess, Earl J. *Banners to the Breeze: The Kentucky Campaign, Corinth and Stones River*. University of Nebraska Press, ISBN 803223803

A fourth volume in the University of Nebraska's "Great Campaigns of the Civil War" series, **Banners to the Breeze** examines three of the major campaigns associated with the 1862 Confederate resurgence in the upper heartland of Kentucky and Tennessee. Following devastating defeat at the hands of Ulysses S. Grant, Henry Halleck, and Don Carlos Buell that swept Confederate presence from the region, a calculated autumn counteroffensive was intended to restore it to Richmond's control. Adding the pivotal border state of Kentucky to the new nation also would move the frontier to the defensible banks of the Ohio River. Moreover, when coordinated with Robert E. Lee's similar invasion of Maryland, foreign recognition could add yet another prize to the endeavor. It was not to be, as Earl J. Hess ably demonstrates in a well-paced account that appears better directed to an informed public rather than to scholars.

The focus of Hess's narrative lies with the Kentucky operation of Braxton Bragg and Edmund Kirby Smith along with the ancillary maneuvers of Earl Van Dorn and Sterling Price in northern Mississippi. The book closes with the bitter winter struggle for Middle Tennessee and Nashville. The series intends to show how campaigns and battles left their imprint on many Americans, from presidents and generals down to privates and civilians. Hess proves that he is comfortable with this genre, having earlier treated *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*.

True to the series' intent to synthesize scholarship appearing since the Civil War centennial, Hess builds upon the more detailed work of Peter Cozzens, Kenneth J. Hafendorfer, James Lee McDonough, and presumably others (although that is hardly apparent from the abbreviated chapter notes and

bibliographic essay). His dramatic narrative, however, portrays anew the blood and gore of the battles of Perryville, Iuka, Corinth, and Stones River. The strategic planning and faltering leadership of Bragg, Smith, Van Dorn, and Price are set against more successful if equally unspectacular performances by Buell and William S. Rosecrans. The national administrations in Washington and Richmond remain in the background, for the most part, although occasional references are made to domestic politics and civilian reaction to the campaigns and battles. Hess correctly assesses that it was Lee's action in the East rather than anything in the Mississippi Valley that conditioned European response to events in late 1862. The real strength of **Banners to the Breeze** rests in the broadened coverage it provides for the Iuka/Corinth component of the campaign triad.

Incorporating some contemporary accounts with newly discovered photographs of the Corinth carnage, Hess revisits campaigns that he thinks have been neglected by most modern historians. His portrayal of men and events at this level is adequate but hardly reflects the rich recent scholarship regarding personalities, organizational and combat arms development, as well as logistics during this period. Moreover, his account overlooks important aspects of war and society in the embattled heartland of 1862. The scholarship of Stephen Ash, Mark Grimsley, Noel Fisher, and this reviewer enjoys little reflection in the text. Hess merely genuflects toward the role of independent cavalry raiders and their partisan auxiliaries that definitely affected the pace of standard military operations. It may be adequate to advance the work of the late Thomas L. Connelly, but the series editors' intent to look beyond battlefield and headquarters tent "to the wider political and social context within which the campaigns unfolded" surely warrants a more comprehensive effort.

Banners to the Breeze is updated traditional military history. In a greatly synthesized manner, it fulfills what series editors Anne J. Bailey and Brooks D. Simpson seek -- "how the ends and means of waging war reflect larger political objectives and priorities as well as social values." Hess has done his job, given these guidelines, even if he offers only the most tantalizing glimpse of the military, political, economic, and social events that when properly integrated offer a rich tapestry of what he correctly suggests was a dramatic turning point in the War.

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