

Visual War: Dictionary Offers Crisp Text And Splashy Illustrations

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Review

VISUAL WAR

Dictionary offers crisp text and splashy illustrations

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Stanchak, John *The Visual Dictionary of the Civil War*. DK Publishing, ISBN 789451662

The Visual Dictionary of the Civil War is certainly a beautiful book. A large trim size, a clean design with plenty of archival black-and-white and color illustrations, and just enough words make this book not only inviting but also hard to put down. Billed as "user-friendly for people of all ages," it lives up to the promise.

Every two-page spread of **The Visual Dictionary of the Civil War** highlights a general historical topic: foot soldiers, sailors, black troops, southern and northern leaders, and slavery are just a few. With careful attention given to North and South, each subject is then broken into a series of pictures, captions, labels, and a summary. Under "prisoners of war," for example, the reader is introduced to the parole papers of a Confederate gunner, the grounds of three prisoner-of-war camps, and the anguished faces of several prison survivors.

While each section is not comprehensive, it does serve as an introduction to the subject. And the illustrations -- over 250 in the entire book -- help to make the subject come alive. The author, John Stanchak, a historical writer and former editor of *Civil War Times*, painstakingly labels every artifact, photograph, or artwork, and provides the human story behind many of them. He exhibits the jacket of Major D.C. Merwin, General P.G.T. Beauregard's spurs, and Major General William T. Sherman's campaign hat, and exposes the men behind the War's elite units.

Most of **The Visual Dictionary of the Civil War** spotlights the weapons used, from blades to rifles to cannons, and the different kinds of soldiers, from gunners to generals. Most of the action recorded takes place on or near the

battlefield or on water. Life elsewhere is for the most part unexplored, with little recognition given to roles that male civilians, women, and children played in the War.

What John Stanchak has written is an attractive companion to other Civil War books. **The Visual Dictionary of the Civil War** assumes the reader knows a great deal about the War and its chronology. Although well-indexed, a time line and further reading section would have made the book even more "user-friendly."

But the recipe for the book -- the design, the numerous illustrations, and the crisp text -- must be working. **The Visual Dictionary of the Civil War** is part of the DK Visual Dictionary Series that includes everything from ancient civilizations to cars to physics to the universe!

Carolyn P. Yoder is the senior editor of history at Highlights magazine.