

Between The York And The James: Nine Essays Put Peninsula And Seven Days Battles In Context

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Review

BETWEEN THE YORK AND THE JAMES

Nine essays put Peninsula and Seven Days battles in context

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Gallagher, Gary W. *The Richmond Campaign of 1862: The Peninsula & the Seven Days*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000-09-01. ISBN 807825522

This is the seventh installment in the University of North Carolina Press's Military Campaigns of the Civil War series. Though each volume is intended as a supplement to more traditional narratives, the series has been influential in providing new interpretations by challenging tired assumptions and supplanting old questions.

A common thread that ties the series together are the essays by Gary W. Gallagher, which place each campaign in a broad context. In fact, the opening essay in **The Richmond Campaign of 1862** by Gallagher is best read alongside his essay in the companion volume, *The Antietam Campaign*. Reading the two essays in conjunction reveals how each campaign flowed into the other.

Not only in the case of the Richmond campaign, but also with any military operation, we need to know, according to Gallagher: "How did it figure in the entire tapestry of the war? How did Union and Confederate civilian morale change as a result of the campaign? How did the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia change? Was the conflict significantly different because of what happened on the Peninsula and at Richmond during that spring and early summer?"

Such questions have challenged critics of Lee's military strategy who argue that his reliance on offensive tactics drained resources and deprived the Confederacy of victory. These critics - most notably, Alan Nolan - rely primarily on the analysis of statistics and questionable assumptions about what kind of decisions would have led to lasting Confederate independence.

Though there may be a certain amount of pleasure in speculating about whether Lee's offensive tactics (compared to the alternative of a defensive stance) cost his nation the war, it is not clear that we learn anything about Lee's thoughts and the historical context in which he operated. Gallagher and other contributors in the series continually remind us that decisions on the battlefield and even its location are rarely decided in a vacuum; there are constant economic, social, and political pressures.

Two additional essays in **The Richmond Campaign of 1862** take on the challenge of placing the Richmond campaign in a broader perspective. The first, by James Marten, addresses the ways in which the location of the Union army on the Peninsula affected the lives of white and black noncombatants and how that presence affected the socio-political structure of southeastern Virginia. In another essay, William A. Blair sets the battles in the context of how they influenced and convinced Northerners that "little hope existed for a significant loyalist groundswell within the Confederacy." Through key committees in Congress and the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, radical leaders were able to push for changes in the military policies concerning the confiscation of property, the return of fugitive slaves, and the eventual use of blacks in the army. Though Blair does not directly address the issue, his argument has important bearing on the subject of whether the South succumbed as a result of battlefield losses or an insufficient level of nationalism.

Other essays focus on narrower topics, including the performances of Stonewall Jackson, John Magruder, and George McClellan. William J. Miller assesses McClellan's tactical decisions from the perspective of his chief engineer, General John Gross Barnard, who was responsible for constructing bridges over the Chickahominy River. Robert E.L. Krick examines the charge of W.H.C. Whiting's division at Gaines's Mill and concludes that it was a "defining moment in the history of the Army of Northern Virginia." The final essay by Keith S. Bohannon looks at artillery effectiveness at Malvern Hill. With the publication of this book, The Military Campaigns of the Civil War series now extends through to the battle of Spotsylvania in 1864, making it easier for readers to take what I call the "long-view" of the Civil War.

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