

From Shiloh to Savannah: The Seventh Illinois Infantry in the Civil War

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Review

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Ambrose, D. Leib *From Shiloh to Savannah: The Seventh Illinois Infantry in the Civil War*. Northern Illinois University Press, \$35.00 ISBN 875803091

Military Memoir

A newly annotated edition of Ambrose's account

With all due respect to the writer and filmmaker for *Gods and Generals*, most of the Civil War took place beyond the ken of Lee, Jackson, and Virginia. Nowhere is this more apparent than in this new edition of D. Leib Ambrose's classic reminiscence of the Seventh Illinois. From the first Union victories in the west at Forts Henry and Donelson through Shiloh to Sherman's march to the sea, the regiment served until the final days in the Carolinas. Rising from private soldier to junior officer, Ambrose was an eyewitness to that saga and became one of the first veterans to publish his recollections after the war in much the same format as he recorded them in the first place. His account, out-of-print since 1868, traced the first Illinois volunteer regiment from its muster to its demobilization. Civil War historian Daniel E. Sutherland provides an introduction and explanatory notes to compliment this new edition of **From Shiloh to Savannah: The Seventh Illinois Infantry in the Civil War**.

Battle aficionados will savor the Seventh's bloodiest battles — Shiloh and Allatoona Pass — where the unit played a critical role. Yet, these infantrymen slogged through the Corinth campaign as well as the trek across eastern Georgia and thence up the coast past Savannah. Still, Ambrose was at his best in recounting what probably attracted Sutherland to the reminiscence in the first place. This University of Arkansas professor has focused his own recent work on Civil War insurgency and partisan warfare. And, it was here that the Seventh Illinois often found itself mired in that unglamorous duty of protecting lines of communication, battling unrepentant rebel civilians, and what modern warfare terms pacification if not winning the hearts and minds of the local populace.

The Illinois took to horse and mule as raiders themselves, chasing guerrillas, or attacking infrastructures in Confederate-held areas of Tennessee and Alabama. Ambrose vividly portrayed the stark relationship between violence and daily army life — beyond the glamorous and more famous set-piece battlefields. He thus provided the grist for what Sutherland himself likes to analyze — the transition of the Civil War from limited to total or hard war as seen through the eyes of the perpetrators — the soldiery. Both sides contributed to this transformation in the nature of modern combat. Forage, pillage, destruction began with the ranks and then transformed to formal policy at higher echelons with the realization that individual and random actions can be systematized toward reaching war termination. So, it is here, rather than as stirring regimental history, that D. Leib Ambrose's original diary-like memoirs can benefit our modern appreciation and understanding of Civil War military history. One might well utilize the whole, continuing flood of similar newly published or reprinted memoirs, diaries, letters, and other primary source materials in this manner. They are the first-person vehicles (in the participants' own words) for exploring the byways of camp and field. By what they record (the daily existence of citizen soldiers, civilians, the under-class as well as nobility), as well as what they omit (politically sensitive socio-cultural topics like African-Americans, sexual mores, Victorian sensitivities to linguistic terminology), such material inserts us back in time (sans interpretive sanitization of modern historiography). Ambrose's prose was sprightly, his focus tight, and dimensions of his account manageability serve a time-starved modern readership. Once again, he and his modern patron, Dan Sutherland, convince us of another war, out beyond the Old Dominion, one where cavaliers and Dixie were subsumed by bloody passion and logistical practicality.

B. Franklin Cooling is Chair, Department of Grand Strategy and Mobilization, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University, Washington, DC. He is currently preparing a third volume in his study of the Civil War in Kentucky and Tennessee, covering the final events of 1864 and 1865 including the battles of Franklin and Nashville.