

Shanks: The Life and Wars of General Nathan G. Evans, CSA

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Review

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Silverman, Jason H., Thomas, Jr., Samuel N., and Evans, IV, Beverly D..
Shanks: The Life and Wars of General Nathan G. Evans, CSA. Da Capo Press,
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Military man

West Point cadet becomes outstanding Confederate officer

Shanks is a well-researched book about General Nathaniel G. Evans, a lesser known Confederate leader. The text covers not only his years of service as a combat leader in the service of his home state and the Confederacy, but includes the history of his family in first the colonies and then the United States. This sets the stage for our introduction to Evans himself. We learn of the family and the man who entered the US Military Academy to be commissioned as Second Lieutenant.

After leaving West Point, we are given an all too brief view of life of the frontier army in Texas in the 1850s. Evans, who picked up the name Shanks while at West Point, begins his real training to become an Army Officer while assigned to this frontier duty in action against the various Native American tribes in conflict with settlers on the Texas frontier. It is during this period that Evans first comes in contact with Robert E. Lee, then a Lieutenant Colonel in the army stationed in San Antonio. The letters from Evans and his family members, and official correspondence, give this work a special flavor of authenticity. This is a tantalizing view of the early days of the United States Army. For those with a special interest in this period of the army I suspect that this book would be a good place to start.

Evans has an outstanding career on the Texas frontier. He takes part in a particularly important battle against the Comanches which had a major impact on the nature of this conflict. From this point the story follows Evans through the break up of the Union and his return to his home state of South Carolina and the

opening battle of the War Between the States at Fort Sumter.

The story of Evans then takes us to the First Battle of the Manassas and his outstanding service at that battle. Along with Evans' successes in battle we are shown an interesting insight into his personality. Evans seems to have had personality clashes that perhaps kept him from rising to greater prominence in the Confederacy. Those who are familiar with military justice these days can appreciate the experience Evans had with court-martials. He was the subject of several such actions which undoubtedly impeded his career. Though acquitted in both, he was caught up in a bureaucratic battle with General Beauregard.

Shanks ends with Evans' career after the war and until his death. This is a finely written, highly readable book. I find it a well-researched work with ample footnotes, a bibliography and an index. It is a quality addition to the bookshelf of the casual reader, the Civil War Buff, or the serious scholar. The modest price makes **Shanks** a most worthy investment.

William S. Gross, COL AUS (Ret.), is the emergency management coordinator for Dallas. His most recent article, Homeland Defense, appeared in Small Wars and Insurgencies (Spring 2002).