

### After Gettysburg: Cavalry Operations in the Eastern Theater July 14, 1863 to December 31, 1863

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## Review

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**Trout, Robert J.** *After Gettysburg: Cavalry Operations in the Eastern Theater July 14, 1863 to December 31, 1863.* Publisher: Eagle Editions, Ltd., \$26.00  
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### An In-Depth Perspective to Cavalry History

The Gettysburg Campaign exacted a cost from both armies. The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia's casualty rate approached forty percent, while the Union Army of the Potomac's losses amounted to one-fourth of its rank and file. In the campaign's aftermath, Robert E. Lee stated that George G. Meade's "army will be as quiet as a sucking dove" for the next six months. Lee's prediction, essentially, became true as both armies required time to heal.

An interlude in active operations transpired in Virginia from the late summer of 1863 to the spring of 1864. Each opponent conducted a major offensive operation during the period—Lee's Bristoe Campaign in mid-October and Meade's Mine Run Campaign at the end of November. Neither offensive resulted in heavy casualties or in altering the strategic stalemate in the region. Both armies settled down in central Virginia, contesting the ground along the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers.

The daily conduct of operations—reconnaissances, raids, and encounters—fell primarily upon the opposing cavalry units, which is the subject of Robert J. Trout's finely researched and detailed study. The major theme of the work is the increasing prowess of Federal mounted units and the deteriorating fighting ability of Confederate horsemen. It was a story of Union superiority in numbers, arms, equipment, and horseflesh. It was also a story of the combat skill and spirit of Jeb Stuart and his redoubtable officers and men.

Trout chronicles the clashes between the opposing mounted forces. These lesser-known engagements—Shepherdstown, second and third battles of Brandy

Station, Buckland Mills, a pair of clashes at Culpeper Court House, Jack's Shop, Rapidan Station, Yates' Ford, and James City—are described, often in meticulous detail, by the author. A long-standing historian of cavalry units and operations in the East, Trout knows his subject well, and it is evident in his portrayal of leaders and of common horse soldiers.

The author's deep knowledge of the material is demonstrated further in his critiques of the Union and Confederate ranking officers. He offers solid judgments on Federal leaders such as Alfred Pleasonton, John Buford, David Gregg, Justin Kilpatrick, Wesley Merritt, and George Armstrong Custer. Likewise, Trout presents characterizations of Stuart, Wade Hampton, Fitz Lee, William E. "Grumble" Jones, and Rooney Lee. Finally, he gives deserving recognition to individual regiments and brigades in both armies.

The research in unpublished manuscripts, contemporary and postwar newspapers, government documents, regimental histories, and published diaries and memoirs is outstanding. Endnotes are placed conveniently after each chapter, with many containing additional information or analyses of conflicting material. Twenty-five maps are bunched together in the middle of the book, which makes them less useful in supplementing the narrative descriptions of engagements and of areas of operations.

Trout's book fills a neglected void in cavalry operations in the East. It is unquestionably the most researched, thorough, and detailed work on the subject. The author's desire for thoroughness and details, however, makes for a plodding read. The narrative unfolds in a day-by-day, repetitive fashion. Few facts seem to be neglected or excluded. Almost on a daily basis, the author provides the names of companies assigned to picket duty, whether they became engaged in an action or not. While his treatment of the subject is unlikely to ever be matched, the story gets lost at points in numbing detail.

Nevertheless, *After Gettysburg* is a solid work of history. Despite its narrative shortcomings, it is marked by commendable research, deep knowledge, and sound judgments. It should stand for a long time as the finest book on the subject.

*Jeffrey D. Wert is author of Cavalryman of the Lost Cause: A Biography of J.E.B. Stuart.*