

Marching With Sherman: Through Georgia and the Carolinas With the 154th New York

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Review

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A Ground Up Perspective of Sherman's March to the Sea

Marching with Sherman: Through Georgia and the Carolinas with the 154th New York by Mark Dunkelman is the latest addition to the literature on this decisive Civil War campaign. Previously, Joseph Glatthar, in his 1985 *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns*, provided a comprehensive account of the events as seen through the eyes of the federal soldiers. Later, Jacqueline Glass Campbell in her 2003 *When Sherman Marched North from the Sea: Resistance on the Confederate Home Front*, focused on the experiences of southern women and blacks. Dunkelman's book is a useful complement to these volumes because, rather than taking any particular point of view, it is a deliberate effort to provide a broad and balanced set of perspectives and reactions to the event. He clearly outlines the breadth of his book saying "*Marching with Sherman* follows a single Union regiment through Georgia and the Carolinas, introduces some southerners in its path, and considers evolving memories of those events along that specific route" (18). As a result, he includes military and civilian, northern and southern, black and white, young and old, and contemporary and modern perspectives.

The regiment to which Dunkelman refers is the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry, of which his great-grandfather, John Langhans, was a member. Like any organization, the 154th New York was a composite which both "revealed the good qualities of worthy men and the ragged edges of rascals" (66). On one end of the spectrum were the notorious "bummers" who slipped away from the main column and cast a "foul blot" on the otherwise military masterpiece (66). Because Sherman encountered little organized resistance in his path, tales of heroism are few. Instead, the examples of the 154th New York's better nature

are represented by its orderly occupation of Savannah (100) or individual soldiers who brought provisions to hungry southern babies (72). Dunkelman clearly has an emotional connection to the regiment's soldiers, but by no means becomes their apologist.

The southerners Dunkelman "introduces" are mainly women and children, since most of the men were either serving in the Confederate army or were in hiding (18). The women run the gamut from obstinate Confederates, to pragmatic cooperators, to slaves. As he did with the federal soldiers, Dunkelman effectively demonstrates there was no monolithic southern persona. "While some southern women awaited the Yankees with valuables hidden on their persons, feeling free from harm," he writes, "others awaited the enemy in fear, shocked by rumors of misbehavior and rape" (46). One "ardent rebel" was Rebecca Ann Harris of Milledgeville who snarled at a group of loitering soldiers, "Stand aside and permit a lady to pass" (62-63). Juxtaposed against this confrontational attitude was young Carrie Berry who described the Federal soldier who guarded their property in Atlanta as "a very good friend to us," but after the war Berry and her family were ostracized by fellow Georgians as collaborationists (35). Also included in the ranks of southerners, though markedly distinct from the white population, are the slaves who "had no particular place to go..., other than to follow the army" (53). Almost absent from the account are voices of Confederate soldiers, testifying to the scant military resistance Sherman encountered. There is an occasional, usually critical, mention of Joseph Wheeler's cavalry and even less, but more positive in nature, of Wade Hampton (82, 128). Although Dunkelman reports a Milledgeville newspaper perhaps tongue-in-check announced him as a "Yankee historian," he certainly maintains his objectivity in his treatment of the southern and Confederate perspective (194).

The most interesting part of Dunkelman's story is his treatment of the "evolving memories" of Sherman's march (18). He describes a deliberate and effective campaign of the United Daughters of the Confederacy to produce a "godly ordained view of history" that did much to advance the Lost Cause (16). He explores, and often discredits, recurring themes in family legends such as federal kindness generated by Masonic fraternity, destitute southern families that survived on the "dropped corn" of Sherman's column, towns spared destruction by Sherman's personal intervention for myriad reasons, and southern belles forced to partially disrobe and treat vile Yankees to an impromptu piano recital. Dunkelman considers these legends to "form a bridge to today's apocryphal

Sherman tales" (17).

The inspiration for Dunkelman's book were the "stories my father heard from his grandfather... that transported me to my great-grandfather's side" (1). It is a book, as Dunkelman portends in his introduction, of "history and memory." To obtain this mixture, Dunkelman set out to form "a unique hybrid" by intertwining regimental histories, accounts of southerners in Sherman's path, studies of myths and legends of the marches, and reports of postwar travellers in Sherman's wake (7). As "a simple matter of justice" he worked to include both northern and southern perspectives (196). He has met his mark with a refreshingly balanced, unobtrusive, and neutral collection of how the same event was viewed differently from a variety of perspectives.

Kevin Dougherty is an adjunct professor and tactical officer at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. He is the author of several books on the Civil War, most recently The Vicksburg Campaigns 1862-1863: Leadership Lessons (Casemate, 2011). He is currently working on an analysis of the Port Royal Experiment.