

### Shenandoah 1862: Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign

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## Review

**Browning, Judkin**

**Spring 2009**

**Cozzens, Peter** *Shenandoah 1862: Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign*.  
University of North Carolina Press, \$35.00 hardcover ISBN 9780807832006

### The Shenandoah Campaign and Stonewall Jackson

In his fascinating monograph, Peter Cozzens, an independent scholar and author of *The Darkest Days of the War: The Battles of Iuka and Corinth* (1997), sets out to paint a balanced portrait of the 1862 Shenandoah Valley campaign and offer a corrective to previous one-sided or myth-enshrouded historical interpretations. Cozzens points out that most histories of the campaign tell the story exclusively from the perspective of Stonewall Jackson's army, neglecting to seriously analyze the decision making process on the Union side, thereby simply portraying the Union generals as the inept foils to Jackson's genius. Cozzens skillfully balances the accounts, looking behind the scenes at the Union moves and motives as well as Jackson's. As a result, some historical characters have their reputations rehabilitated, while others who receive deserved censure, often for the first time.

After a succinct and useful environmental and geographical overview of the Shenandoah region, Cozzens begins his narrative with the Confederate army during Jackson's early miserable forays into the western Virginia Mountains in the winter of 1861, where he made unwise strategic decisions and ordered foolish assaults on canal dams near the Potomac River that accomplished nothing. Cozzens then follows Jackson into his first battle at Kernstown in March 1862, a defeat in which Jackson grossly underestimated the force he was attacking, and made no clear tactical or strategic plans for the battle leaving his commanders to fend for themselves. Cozzens agrees with many historians who condemn Jackson for his unreasonable arrest and condemnation of Brigadier General Richard Garnett, who performed admirably under the extreme circumstances. However, Cozzens starts to shift from the historical interpretations when he analyzes Jackson's command style. While pro-Southern

historians have praised and celebrated Jackson's notorious secretiveness and refusal to share his plans with his lieutenants, Cozzens perceptively argues, in dozens of examples throughout the work, that such a command quirk was Jackson's single greatest flaw, which time and again robbed him of a chance at greater victories.

When Jackson's army routed smaller Union forces at Front Royal and then Winchester and marched toward Harpers Ferry in late May 1862, Lincoln famously directed General Irvin McDowell to postpone his march toward Richmond and redirect many of his troops to the Shenandoah Valley. Lincoln has often been accused of stopping the movement because he feared for the safety of the capital, but Cozzens places Lincoln's motive in its proper context: "There was no panic in Lincoln's decision; no blind reaction to, nor even mention of, a possible Confederate descent on Washington. Lincoln's intentions were aggressive; he would redirect McDowell in order to trap Jackson" (345). While Lincoln ordered McDowell to cut off Jackson from the east, he also ordered General John C. Fremont to do the same from the west. That neither of these commanders succeeded in doing so caused Lincoln endless frustration. Cozzens places the blame not on the commander in chief, whose strategic plans were fundamentally sound, but on a variety of other human and natural factors. First, McDowell did not obey the orders as promptly as he could, busy as he was wallowing in self-pity; McDowell was extraordinarily dismayed at being ordered to halt his march, and only grudgingly obeyed Lincoln's directive. Second, Cozzens argues that General James Shields, commanding the spearhead division from McDowell's corps, proved to be one of the most incompetent of Union generals. While other generals acquitted themselves quite well, Cozzens concludes, through a careful examination of the general's actions, that Shields deserves the censure that historians have heaped on him—for moving too slowly, accepting erroneous intelligence that indicated he faced greater forces than he did, and for disingenuously exalting his own role and condemning others in his post-campaign accounts. Cozzens also freely scorns the excitable General John W. Geary for fabricating threats east of the Shenandoah that distracted Lincoln and McDowell. As far as Fremont's failure to cut Jackson off, Cozzens rescues Fremont's reputation in a small way. He makes a strong case that Fremont's lack of supplies and the nature of the terrain made it far more difficult for him to execute the maneuver that Lincoln felt he should. Lincoln's map showed only the short fifty-mile distance Fremont had to cover, but not the daunting mountainous terrain, weather difficulties, lack of roads, or near starvation of

Fremont's army. However, Cozzens does conclude that Fremont wasted opportunities at Cross Keys on June 8 by being far too tentative.

Cozzens points out that the Confederate army had plenty of its own flaws that prevented even greater successes. Not only should Jackson have been more communicative, but Jackson was not well served by his cavalry commander, Turner Ashby, who was frequently nowhere to be found. Jackson reprimanded Ashby a number of times, even prompting Ashby to resign on one occasion before Jackson convinced him otherwise. Jackson's cavalry often provided erroneous intelligence, as it did when it nearly disastrously underreported the number of Union troops at Kernstown. Ashby and his ill-disciplined soldiers frequently were nowhere to be found at the critical moments of battle. For example, after routing the Union army at Winchester, Jackson's cavalry was absent when it could have potentially annihilated General Nathaniel Banks' beaten troops. Jackson also comes under criticism for his tactical handling of several battles. At McDowell, Kernstown, and most notably, at Port Republic on June 9, Jackson's piecemeal deployments caused far more casualties than necessary. Cozzens also argues that despite the newspaper coverage that apotheosized Jackson as the greatest Confederate hero, he was not, contrary to popular myth, universally loved by his soldiers. The soldiers' letters complain of Jackson's tactics, marches, and disinterest more than they celebrate his successes.

While many of the details and interpretations that Cozzens gives will not be entirely new to scholars, his careful analysis of the Union and Confederate strategic and tactical decisions takes the campaign out of the pro-Southern mythos and places it in proper historical context. However, Cozzens does make a few assertions that scholars will debate. One of his interpretations that make this reviewer raise an eyebrow is his conclusion that Lincoln, though with the best intentions, ultimately made a mistake by ordering McDowell's corps to suspend its march to Richmond. Cozzens concludes, "With the weight of McDowell's added numbers, not even one so cautious or so apt to overestimate the enemy's strength as McClellan could have failed to capture Richmond" (508). Given McClellan's illogical calculations, it is too much to assume that with those 40,000 troops he would have become a different commander than he proved to be during the war. This is certainly a leap of faith that many scholars would not be willing to make. Another minor flaw is that the book could have used more maps of the Shenandoah region throughout the narrative, rather than force the reader to constantly return to the small regional map on page 14. However, these

minor flaws notwithstanding, Cozzens has written a balanced, well-paced, well-researched account. Replete with astute and circumspect judgments, this work should be properly afforded the distinction of the definitive, comprehensive account of Jackson's Valley Campaign.

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