

Major General Isaac Ridgeway Trimble: Biography of a Baltimore Confederate

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Review

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Tucker, Leslie R. *Major General Isaac Ridgeway Trimble: Biography of a Baltimore Confederate.* McFarland & Company, Inc., \$35.00 softcover ISBN 786421312

Psychology of a General

An Experiment and Exploration of Character

Leslie Tucker's new book on Confederate Maj. Gen. Isaac Ridgeway Trimble is as much of a biographical experiment as it is a review of the facts of Trimble's long and accomplished life. The experiment succeeds, but not without significant flaws. The book may challenge the patience of readers.

Rather than simply telling Trimble's story, Tucker uses Abraham Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs to scrutinize Trimble's character, motivation, and decision-making, especially his decision to fight for the Confederacy. Tucker's plodding introduction is akin to a freshman course in psychology, complete with definitions and philosophical assumptions described in careful, academic prose.

Fortunately, Trimble's accomplishments as a soldier, engineer, and businessman manage to transcend, for the most part, the author's psychological framework. Trimble's Civil War years, from the opening guns in 1861 to Gettysburg and his lengthy imprisonment on Johnson's Island, are a highlight of the book. Tucker deserves credit for detailing Trimble's military movements and decisions effectively.

The passages on Trimble's Johnson's Island captivity provide greater insight into the general's character and strength than any artificial extrapolation of Maslow's hierarchy. Seriously wounded at Gettysburg, Trimble defied the odds and less than ideal conditions, surviving until he was released late in the war. Trimble, ever the aggressive warrior, was en route to rejoin Robert E. Lee when he received word of the Confederate surrender.

Also insightful are Tucker's descriptions of Trimble's relationships with his fellow officers, especially Lieut. Gen. Thomas Stonewall Jackson and his successor, Lieut. Gen. Richard Ewell. Trimble, an ambitious fighter determined to secure promotion or die trying, often found himself in conflict with the more cautious Ewell, who famously dismissed Trimble's suggestion of an attack on Cemetery Hill at Gettysburg on July 1, 1863.

Readers may accept or reject the attempt to put Isaac Trimble under a psychological microscope. There is a fascinating life at the heart of this story, however, and Tucker's book takes an important step toward filling in a gap in Confederate biography.

John Deppen is the current president of the Susquehanna Civil War Round Table and a living historian who portrays Major General Winfield Scott Hancock. His articles and reviews have appeared in Military Heritage Magazine, The Civil War News, and The Daily Item, a newspaper serving central Pennsylvania. Deppen can be reached at GeneralWSH@aol.com.