

### Nothing but Victory: The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1865

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## Review

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**Woodworth, Steven E.** *Nothing But Victory: The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1865*. Alfred A. Knopf, \$40.00 ISBN 375412182

Western Juggernaut

History of The Army of Tennessee

Steven Woodworth's latest release, **Nothing But Victory**, explores the Union's Army of Tennessee, arguably the most successful force during the Civil War. The Army of Tennessee, composed largely of Midwestern men, descended the western rivers and railroads deep into the Confederate heartland. Along the way, they defeated a determined adversary and devastated the Confederate infrastructure while overcoming enormous logistical challenges and a significant amount of incompetence and infighting among its officers. Woodworth's sweeping narrative follows the Army of Tennessee's campaigns from Shiloh to Vicksburg, Chattanooga, Atlanta, and the Carolinas; however, he offers more than just another headquarters history. **Nothing But Victory** gives character to the army by weaving soldiers' accounts into the operational record.

Based upon the voluminous bureaucracy generated by the staff officers, similar histories often devolve into an endless string of engagements, and as a result, the armies themselves frequently assume their commander's personality. Woodworth eschews this approach by constructing his story around primary sources taken from the ranks. This strategy highlights this particular group of Federal soldiers' initial optimism at enlistment and the development of their dogged determination as the war dragged on for four tough years. Their *esprit de corps* gave them the ability to prevail over difficult circumstances time and again, and their fortitude in turn instilled confidence into their commanders, particularly William T. Sherman and Ulysses S. Grant, as well as their countrymen. The men of the Army of Tennessee, Woodworth contends, deserves the lion's share of the credit for producing the commanders who would lead the armies to victory and in carrying out the strategies the military depended upon to

defeat the enemy.

Woodworth's ability to humanize the army extends to the staff officers, too. Through the eyes of those who served beneath them, he examines how many of these once ordinary men became extraordinary commanders. **Nothing But Victory** details the dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics of the Army of Tennessee in its early stages, especially between Grant, Sherman, Charles Smith, Henry Halleck, John McClernand, and William Rosecrans. It also traces the rise of good combat commanders like James McPherson and William Hazen, and recognizes the contributions of officers such as Greenville Dodge. Woodworth aptly demonstrates how the Army of Tennessee partnered the best leaders in the war with seasoned veteran soldiers to accomplish their missions with efficiency perhaps unparalleled in the war.

The best example of Woodworth's bottom up approach comes in his retelling of the army's March to the Sea and the Carolina campaigns. Through the eyes of the soldiers, the frustration and war weariness becomes apparent as they move beyond Atlanta. Their prolonged contact with the enemy leads to the brutality and unforgiving nature of the war's final months. Following the Army of Tennessee as they move through a hostile civilian population, being harassed by guerrillas, suffering atrocities, arresting and executing prisoners, and even encountering land mine warfare invites eerie comparisons to modern-day combat. No Civil War army witnessed the spectrum of warfare like the Army of Tennessee, and the effects of such conflict upon individuals demonstrate the enormous physical and mental toll exacted from soldiers in such operations.

Despite his tack away from operational history, Woodworth's account still focuses largely on the army's major actions and overlooks the rear area occupation forces away from the front. He mentions little of 16th Corps' troubles with occupation duty, guerrilla warfare, and command incompetence, and fairly or unfairly, largely ignores detached units such as those on the Red River campaign. The book presents the background of the men who served in the Army of Tennessee and their combat experience well, but abruptly ends with the victory parade down Constitution Avenue saying nothing of their postwar experiences. Additionally, there is an inexplicable lack of maps and an order of battle/organizational chart to follow the frequent command changes and reorganizations that occur.

**Nothing But Victory** is a great single volume history of the Union Army of Tennessee. It complements well some of the older operational histories which focus largely on the commanders, as well as, some of the newer command histories of other armies. It should also draw attention back to the western theater, its glories and its controversies, and should inspire historians to reassess the contributions of the western armies as the nation approaches the Civil War's landmark sesquicentennial.

*Derek W. Frisby is a USMC veteran and an assistant professor of history at Middle Tennessee State University. His manuscript, **Homemade Yankees: West Tennessee Unionists During the Civil War Era**, is currently under review by the University of Tennessee Press.*