Annotations

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Conyers, Marshall
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McMurry, Richard M., ed.
Fall 2007


Benson, Susan Williams, ed.
Fall 2007


Williams, Patrick G.
Fall 2007
Williams, Patrick G. *Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction*. Texas A&M; University Press, $29.95 hardcover ISBN 9781585445738

Minor, Hubbard T.  
Fall 2007


Kroll, Douglas  
Fall 2007


Hart, Alison  
Fall 2007


Collins, Robert  
Fall 2007


Political General

The Rise and Fall of James G. Blunt
James G. Blunt was one of the North's many political generals, but he was not typical of the breed. While Blunt's ambitions may have outstripped his abilities, he was a fighter. On more than one occasion, his courage, aggressiveness, and tenacity compensated for his deficiencies, and he ended up compiling a list of achievements that excelled the records of many of the Union Army's professionally trained commanders. Blunt raised and led the armies that reestablished Union authority in much of Indian Territory and northwest Arkansas. He defeated Rebel forces in pitched battles at Old Fort Wayne, Cane Hill, Prairie Grove, and Honey Springs. He personally supervised the recapture of Fort Smith, Arkansas. In the fall of 1864, he played a leading role in crushing Major General Sterling Price's great cavalry raid into Missouri and eastern Kansas.

Blunt was born in Maine on July 21, 1826. He graduated from medical school in 1849 and moved to Kansas Territory seven years later, where he emerged as a leading abolitionist and free stater. By late 1857, Blunt had become an aide to James H. Lane, the flamboyant Jayhawker and rising politician who had been named major general of the free state militia. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Blunt enlisted in the Union Army. Lane, now a U.S. senator, had Blunt commissioned as the lieutenant colonel of the 3rd Kansas Volunteer Infantry Regiment in July 1861. The following April, Lane secured his protégé an appointment as brigadier general and commander of the Department of Kansas. Blunt remained true to his prewar principles, making public pronouncements in the summer of 1862 in favor of emancipation and raising black troops. Once these measures became official Union policy, Blunt continued to give them his outspoken support.

Senator Lane was a duplicitous schemer with rough-hewn manners, a fiery temper, and a ruthless resolve to run over anyone who stood in his way. A man with such an abrasive character was bound to attract many enemies. As the beneficiary of Lane's sponsorship, James Blunt also inherited the senator's enemies. Even if Blunt had not been a loyal Lane man, his own personality would have made him the target of criticism. The former doctor was a coarse man who did not mince his words. He drank too much and exhibited a fondness for prostitutes. His administration of various Western commands also inspired ugly rumors of corruption. Several professional Union officers took a dislike to Blunt. Despite the latter's many victories, Major General Henry Wager Halleck, the Union Army's chief of staff, dismissed him in April 1864 as a very
quarrelsome man. Brigadier General John M. Schofield, the commander of the
Department of Missouri and Blunt's immediate superior in the middle part of the
war, pushed for the obstreperous Kansan's relief on October 1, 1863, less than a
month after the capture of Fort Smith. Major General Samuel R. Curtis, who
commanded Blunt at other times in the war, was one of the few West Pointers to
appreciate the former doctor's military merits.

**General James G. Blunt: Tarnished Glory** by Robert Collins is the first
book-length biography of the Union general that critics called the fat boy.
Considering Blunt's colorful personality and impressive military career, it is
surprising that he had to wait so long for such a detailed treatment. No doubt the
fact that Blunt's exploits were confined to the Trans-Mississippi theater accounts
for his neglect by Civil War scholars.

Unfortunately, the Collins book does not begin to do justice to its subject.
The author is a freelance writer from Kansas with a passionate interest in local
history. His previous books include *Kansas Railroad Attractions and Ghost
Railroads of Kansas*. The main problem with *General James Blunt* is that its
author thought that he could research this topic without straying outside Kansas.
His bibliography cites only six document collections at the Kansas State
Historical Society and an 1850 census record from a county historical society in
Ohio. Blunt's personal papers did not survive, but Collins could have tapped into
the general's voluminous official correspondence had he visited the National
Archives. In addition, he neglected the opportunity to visit state and local
archives throughout the United States to examine the letters, diaries, and
unwritten memoirs of many of the men who either served under Blunt or fought
against him. Having opted to ignore the sort of sources that have enriched serious
Civil War scholarship for decades, Collins relies largely on printed works,
including period newspapers, which he does not always use judiciously.
Consequently, the book is riddled with frustrating gaps, idle speculation, and
some errors of fact and interpretation. The absence of reference notes also makes
it difficult to know when Collins is performing competently.

*General James Blunt* is an interesting study, and Collins' portrait of the man
is certainly plausible, but the book suffers from an amateurish quality that calls
its reliability into question.

*Gregory J. W. Urwin is a professor of history and associate director of the
Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy at Temple University. He is also*
the editor of *Black Flag over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War*, which was recently released in paperback by *Southern Illinois University Press*.

Nichols, Bruce  
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Kelly, Brian, introduction by  

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Holzer, Harold, ed.  
Joiner, Gary D., ed. *Little to Eat and Thin Mud to Drink: Letters, Diaries, and Memoirs from the Red River Campaigns, 1863-1864.* University of Tennessee Press, $45.00 hardcover ISBN 9781572335714

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Robertson, James I, Jr., introduction by  
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Mackey, Mary  *The Notorious Mrs. Winston.* Berkley Books, $14.00 softcover ISBN 9780425215128

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