

Theater Of A Separate War: The Civil War West Of The Mississippi River, 1861--1865

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Review

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Cutrer, Thomas W. *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865*. University of North Carolina Press, \$40.00 ISBN 9781469631561

Neglected Campaigns Recovered

For a different perspective on *Theater of a Separate War* read Robert Welch's review [here](#).

Thomas Cutrer, professor emeritus of history at Arizona State University and has written a very thoroughly researched and lengthy book on Civil War of the Trans-Mississippi West. Cutrer defines the Trans-Mississippi as exactly that, the entire area west of the Mississippi. The book is the latest addition to the Littlefield History of the Civil War Era Series. His purpose in writing *Theater of a Separate War* was to write an “analytical military narrative... that will establish a foundation and framework for future scholars” who write on Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi West. (p. xii) Time will tell if he succeeds in reaching this lofty goal.

The work’s thoroughness and length are both its strength and greatest weakness. *Theater of a Separate War* seemingly details every military engagement that took place west of the Mississippi, but Cutrer does not separate battles with little or no significance to those that impacted the outcome of the war. He gives all a full going over. Why he gave so much attention to Indian Warfare in the Far West is puzzling, while others, such as the New Mexico Campaign, he gave only one chapter. One gets the impression, from reading the book that no area, no matter its location, was spared the ravages of the war. This is remarkable given the size of the area involved.

Cutrer describes battles in areas as far removed as Arizona, Indian Territory, and Louisiana, although he mainly focuses on Missouri, Arkansas and western Louisiana. In a nod to the current Civil War scholarship on small unit actions

and guerilla warfare, Cutrer devotes a chapter to the guerilla war in Missouri and portions of others to guerilla warfare in other states. The book includes chapters on battles along the Texas coast and Milligan's Bend, part of the campaign for Vicksburg, which took place in Louisiana, west of the Mississippi River. Campaigns often neglected in histories of the Trans-Mississippi Civil War.

Although lengthy and thorough, problems occur that keep the book from achieving the goal Cutrer set forth for it in the Preface, (p. xii) chief among them the sloppy editing, throughout. One example stands out; Cutrer seems to imply Tucson, Arizona is a short distance from the Rio Grande Valley, (p. 113-114) when in fact almost 300 miles separate the two. In a book reported to be a "analytical military narrative" (p. xii) and so thorough in nature, the lack of maps is very puzzling. There is only one rudimentary map at the front of the book, which is of little help. With the profusion of names, dates, the vast distances involved, and profusion of small-scale battles, a series of maps are obviously called for. More than a few typos, awkward transitions, and other mistakes crop up in the manuscript as well.

It is unfortunate that this thoroughly researched and important work is plagued by the problems outlined above. The book would have been greatly enhanced with the addition of more maps, stronger editing, and a conscious effort to prioritize the book's subject matter.

John T. "Jack" Becker

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