

The Tennessee Campaign Of 1864

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Review

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Ed. Woodworth, Steven and Ed. Grear, Charles D.. *The Tennessee Campaign of 1864*. Southern Illinois University Press, \$34.50 ISBN 9780809334520

A Doomed Dream: The Tennessee Campaign of 1864

Until the late 1960s, Civil War historians and enthusiasts focused their attention on the war in the east, that bloody 100-mile stretch between Richmond, Virginia and Washington D.C. The slaughters at Antietam and Gettysburg have also consumed scholar's attention.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the late Thomas Connelly directed historians' interests to the area west of the Appalachian Mountains. The 'Western Theater,' considered the heartland of the Confederacy, stretched from the Appalachians to the banks of the Mississippi. It was here that Professor Connelly stressed that the war was won and lost.

Editors Steven E. Woodworth, a professor of history at Texas Christian University, and Charles D. Grear, professor of history at Central Texas College, have filled in the scholarly gaps in this area with an excellent collection of essays in *The Tennessee Campaign of 1864*.

The majority of the essays make the point that after the fall of Atlanta to Sherman's army on September 1, 1864, the Southern Confederacy was a doomed dream. The following campaign in north Georgia and Middle Tennessee only prolonged the agony. The first chapter is "The Long Lost Diary of Major General Patrick R. Cleburne," edited by William Lee White, historian and park ranger at the Chickamauga Battlefield. Major General Cleburne, known as the "Stonewall of the West," was the best combat commander the Army of the Tennessee had; his division was the best trained and prepared. Cleburne was known to have kept a diary, but it has never surfaced and little of his personal writings exist. White was fortunate enough to stumble across excerpts published in an 1894 newspaper from a diary Cleburne started prior to his final campaign.

White says the diary reveals nothing really new about Cleburne, but confirms a number of assumptions. In a biographical sketch, White states that Cleburne enjoyed reading poetry and scientific articles. His diary entries reveal an excellent writer, strict attention to detail, and a very sensitive nature that appreciated natural beauty.

Chapter Two, by Stewart Bennett, chair of social and behavioral sciences and instructor of history at Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain, Mississippi, is entitled “The Storm Broke in all its Fury: The Struggle for Allatoona Pass.” The battle of Allatoona Pass in northwest Georgia was a struggle that epitomized the bad luck and tragedy of the Army of Tennessee in the campaign of 1864. This bloody confrontation resulted from Hood’s plan to force the Federals to evacuate Atlanta. At first the plan began well; Hood then sent orders to Major General Stewart to send his division commander, General Samuel D. French, to Allatoona Pass. French was to assume control of the pass, fortify the position and destroy the bridge over the nearby Etowah River, all before Sherman could react. French had been warned by locals that the Federals had fortified, garrisoned and established a supply depot there. Sherman had realized the importance of the position, as it could be easily defended from either direction. As a result, Allatoona became an important supply depot for the Federals, protecting about one million rations and nine thousand head of cattle. But inexplicably, Hood was uninformed that the pass would be heavily fortified and that the terrain would make the Federal position very difficult to take.

Dr. Bennett’s detailed account of the ensuing struggle for Allatoona Pass highlights the difficulties under the best conditions of a military campaign in the mountains of northwest Georgia. Lack of knowledge of the terrain, bad roads impassable in inclement weather, conflicting orders, and at times a total lack of communication guaranteed the disastrous outcome for French’s small division; one of the tragedies that lay in store for the Army of Tennessee.

In Chapter Three, “Errant Moves on the Chessboard of War: The Battle of Spring Hill, November 29, 1864,” John R. Lundberg, professor of history at Tarrant County College, Texas, points out that many historians view Spring Hill as a lost opportunity for the South to change the course of the war. Hood did lose a chance to defeat the Union Army under General John Schofield, but the importance of Spring Hill has been overstated for two reasons: Southerners have woven the battle of Spring Hill into the myth of the Lost Cause in the misguided belief that the Confederacy still had a chance to win. Second, Spring Hill is

viewed as a prelude to the disasters at Franklin and Nashville. These beliefs stress that the Confederacy could have avoided these defeats by winning at Spring Hill. Professor Lundberg thoroughly invalidates these assumptions. Moreover, he also points out that Hood's subordinates bear much of the responsibility. A good example is the escape of Schofield's army directly through the arms of the Confederates to safety at Franklin. This incident alone remains the great enigma of the Tennessee Campaign of 1864.

Chapter Four is by Andrew S. Bledsoe, assistant professor of history at Lee University, Cleveland Tennessee. Professor Lee stresses that the Battle of Franklin was a senseless slaughter. Sixty-eight Confederate field officers were killed, wounded or captured. The culture of the Army of Tennessee called for their commanders to lead from the front, lest morale be destroyed and result in a failure of command. The disembowelment of the officer corps did destroy the army's morale and command structure and was harsh even by Civil War standards. Professor Bledsoe's interesting essay concludes that Hood's recklessness was responsible for destroying the cream of his officer corps at Franklin.

Chapter Five, "Killing at Franklin: Anatomy of Slaughter," by Jonathan M. Steplyk, Ph.D., contrasts the battle of Franklin with Pickett's final advance at Gettysburg. He delves in to the emotional and psychological aspects of killing in the Civil War, using examples from the Battle of Franklin. Dr. Steplyk says that the subject of the psychology of killing in combat has gained interest among military historians. To kill in combat requires the suppression of natural and cultural inhibitions; many factors, however, influence how and to what extent this affects the soldier's mind. This is a very interesting and thought-provoking essay on a subject that until recently has not drawn much attention.

Brooks D. Simpson, professor of history at Arizona State University, presents a fascinating discussion on the relationship between Grant and George H. Thomas prior to the Battle of Nashville. He meticulously examines Grant's attitudes and concerns toward Thomas' ostensible reluctance to attack Hood's battered army. Continuing the discussion of Thomas' military ability, Professor Paul L. Schmelzer, military history instructor at Fort Carson, Colorado, challenges those historians who claim George Thomas was a military genius. Using Carl von Clausewitz's definition of a military genius, Thomas falls short. In brief, Clausewitz suggests that those who look for military genius should look past battlefield tactics and consider the success or failure of the political

objectives. Schmelzer concludes that while Thomas was an excellent tactician, he failed to grasp Grant's overall strategy for winning the war.

D. L. Turner, independent author, historian and instructor, and Scott L. Stabler, professor of history at Grand Valley State University, Michigan, gives us an informative discussion of the significant role that black troops played in the Battle of Nashville. Out of about 50,000 African Americans that fought for the Union, 13,000 of these soldiers fought with Thomas at Nashville.

Editor Steven E. Woodworth provides an entertaining discussion of A.J. Smith's detachment at the Battle of Nashville. The author contends that Major General Andrew Jackson Smith's three divisions played the most important role in George Thomas' victory over Hood at Nashville. Among other reasons, Woodworth gives three major factors that contributed to this success – excellent leadership, skilled use of artillery, and the aggressive character of Smith's command.

The tenth essay is contributed by Dr. John J. Gaines, professor of history at American Public University. The study of civilian participants in the Civil War is somewhat of a neglected topic. Dr. Gaines points out that just as officers and enlisted men bore witness to the terrible effects of combat, so did civilians in the vicinity of Franklin and Nashville. Despite the horrors, civilians took on many supportive roles during and after the battle.

Editor Charles D. Grear examines not only the performance but the attitudes of Texans in the Tennessee Campaign of 1864. Since Texans were on the western flank of the Confederacy, they enjoyed more choices of areas in which to serve. Consequently they served in all theaters of conflict and in more states and territories than any other state, Confederate or Union.

The final two essays are contributed by Timothy B. Smith, professor of history at the University of Tennessee, Martin and Jennifer M. Murray, assistant professor of history at University of Virginia, Wise. Dr. Smith gives us a detailed overview of the successful efforts to preserve the Franklin Battlefield while Dr. Murray gives the same treatment to the less successful attempts to save the battlefield of Nashville.

The Tennessee Campaign of 1864 is a splendid compilation which should not only appeal to scholars in the field, but any Civil War enthusiast.

Dr. Wallace Cross specializes in Tudor and Stuart England and British Empire at Austin Peay State University, Tennessee with an interest in the American Civil War. His books include Cry Havoc: A History of the 49th Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Ordeal by Fire: History of the Fourteenth Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment, 1861 – 1865, Selection and Training of the Candidates for the Indian Civil Service: 1870-1880, and A Bibliography of Local and Family History for Thirteen Middle Tennessee Counties.