

Conquered: Why the Army of Tennessee Failed

Benjamin Franklin Cooling

National Defense University, Washington D.C., bfcooling@verizon.net

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Review

Cooling, Benjamin Franklin

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Daniel, Larry J. *Conquered: Why the Army of Tennessee Failed*. University of North Carolina Press, 2019 \$35.00 ISBN 9781469649504

Yes, Virginia, to paraphrase David Goldfield's book title (2002), we are "still fighting the Civil War." Lest we forget, this is probably a good thing and the carnage of military history is always worth remembering. In this case, trying once again to explain Confederate military collapse, well-known authority on the Army of Tennessee Larry Daniel has taken on other doyens of the war in the western theater from Stanley Horn, Tom Connelly, James McDonough, Steven Woodworth, Earl Hess and Richard McMurray to Grady McWhiney, Nathaniel Hughes, Wiley Sword to Michael Ballard, and others. Sometimes pretentious and sometimes convincing but always thought-provoking, Daniel's analysis of generals, men in the ranks and civilian politicians charged with defending that vast swath of territory from the Mississippi to the Alleghenies presents a welcome return to the discussion of the Confederacy's "other" or "Second" army. Maybe keying off Bruce Catton's old phrase this was "Mr. Davis's Other Army." Unfortunately, Americans both then and now may have missed the principal (if debatable) point; this may well have been the South's principal army for geo-political, geographic and strategic reasons and warrants more modern attention than Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, treated in Joseph Glatthaar's *General Lee's Army* that Daniel uses as a model for his own study.

Readers and scholars will inevitably turn first to what Daniel opines about the generals (two Johnstons, one Bragg and one Hood plus capable and inept subordinates along the way). And, Daniel has plenty to say about them, as he does too about their conduct of battles and campaigns and, most of all their interpersonal relations. This is well-furrowed ground, further masticated by Daniel's blunt opinions and observations, plenty of references to the doyens and destined to stir as much new controversy, perhaps, as the current incumbent in the White House. But, some of Daniel's best material resides in chapters on the Army's staff, the decline of cavalry, the

omnipresent resourcing problem (manpower, equipment, foodstuffs), and especially two chapters on the Army of Tennessee as “a band of brothers” and the influence of “that ole time religion” via revivalism amongst the troops as well as a teasing thrust of how all this fit with a rise of Confederate nationalism along the way. So too with the medical and logistical support where some solid monographs and focused studies in recent years have illumined the recesses of forging a Confederate fighting machine. Much of Daniel’s strong suit derives particularly from his dredging archives and collections for original sources, adroit quotation and application of such material to his theses and his quest (seen in his previous work) for bringing the Army of Tennessee alive to us. That organization did function with a different chemistry, organizational culture, focus, and purpose than Marse Robert’s equally representative eastern Confederate army. Yet, put bluntly, neither Daniel nor Glatthaar have sufficiently explained the role and story of African-Americans in either, aside from say, Daniel’s almost obligatory chapter 19 on “Cleburne, Blacks and the Politics of Race,” or, for that matter, women as part of the army’s supportive fabric. Is that forever destined to elude integrative, comprehensive Confederate military history?

Do we really need twenty-three chapters plus epilogue to essentially carry the Army of Tennessee (and its predecessors) only to the moment of its crescendo disaster in John Bell Hood’s Tennessee 1864 campaign? After all, most Civil War historians (southern and northern) would culminate the saga with John Schofield’s bulldog decimation of the flower of an expectant Army of Tennessee at Franklin and George H. Thomas’s masterful juggernaut thereafter that swept the supple hills and vales south of Nashville and virtually annihilated ten pages; their foe as an organized fighting force on the retreat back to Alabama. Daniel glances that distasteful part of the odyssey with a scant ten pages; it surely warrants thrice that to explain “Conquered!” The South might look forever for some faulknerian Roland, but the experiment in Rebellion was over and as Lincoln himself sagely observed the usefulness of the Confederacy’s other army was over after Franklin/Nashville. The specter of Appomattox might be seen in the sleet and mud of December Middle Tennessee. Essays in a forthcoming Oxford University Press anthology may ultimately better integrate war and society in the Army of Tennessee’s battles and campaigns, leaders and followers. Ultimately, its responsibilities were too diverse, its geography too large, its distance to the center of Confederate gravity – Richmond as capital and command and mobilization center – too great. Or “Conquered” as explanation may nest in that droll thought

from an embittered General George Armstrong Pickett on Rebel defeat. He always thought the Yankees had something to do with it. That said, Daniel's volume must take its rightful place as the study of an army, building ultimately to a new generation of work such as promised by Peter Carmichael, Caroline Janney and Aaron-Sheehan-Dean's **Civil War America** series of which it is a part.

*Benjamin Franklin Cooling
National Defense University
Washington D.C.*

Dr. Cooling is the author of three books plus other essays and articles on the Civil War in the upper heartland. He is currently finishing Arming an American Sparta, a study on the evolution of the military-industrial complex with the University of Tennessee Press.