

Yank and Rebel Rangers: Special Operatives in the American Civil War

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Review

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Black, Robert W. *Yank and Rebel Rangers: Special Operatives in the American Civil War*. Pen & Sword Books, Limited, 2021. SOFTCOVER. \$24.95 ISBN 9781526792006 327 pp.

It has long been my opinion that the Civil War was a modern war in many more ways than most even realize. Because of a personal interest in the Zouave infantry drill, the subject of Robert Black's book is of particular interest to me. He carefully explains the difference between Confederate and Union partisan forces, explaining that Confederates were much more often willing to go outside the rules to achieve their ends. Aware of this, Confederate Major John Scott, one of the famed Black Horse Cavalry founders, wrote the Partisan Ranger Act in 1862. The orders spelled out authorization for the army to "form bands of partisan Rangers in companies, battalions, or regiments, either as infantry or cavalry." Although this act should have positively affected partisan groups, few gave it much consideration. Instead, they used it to cover their marauding. Both Union and Confederate armies used small forces of fearless, highly motivated soldiers for special operations behind enemy lines. Skilled in infiltration, these men scouted deep into enemy territory, captured essential personnel, and disrupted lines of communication and logistics. Their lack of consideration for life, gender, age, or physical condition sowed confusion and fear among the civilians of both sides. Sometimes wearing the uniform of the enemy, they faced execution as spies if captured.

The first half of *Yank and Rebel Rangers* is focused on operations in mountainous West Virginia and the lush Shenandoah Valley. The importance of these areas to the war was tremendous. In addition, the rural settlement of the population therein made it easier for Rangers—also known as bushwhackers, guerillas, and partisans—to operate with much secrecy. It is generally acknowledged that these groups were considered to be terrorist in nature, especially those led by William Clark Quantrill, John Hanson, Jesse McNeil, Nathan Bedford Forrest, John Singleton Mosby, Alfred Pike, and John Hunt Morgan. Morgan, Forrest, and

Mosby are not covered in this book. They are, however, the subjects of Black's *Ghost, Thunderbolt, and Wizard*.

There are single chapters on such well-known Confederate partisans as the Hatfields and the McCoys, John Imboden, Turner Ashby, and Harry Gilmore. Additionally, groups like the Moccasin Rangers from West Virginia, the mountain clan of the Thurmond brothers (who sent seven sons to the Confederate army), the Iron Scouts (rangers who were part of J. E. B. Stuart's famous ride around the Union Army in 1862), and the independent unit of Elijah White, which "pitched a fit" when it was mustered into regular Confederate service in late 1863. Finally, there are separate chapters on the famous St. Albans Raid and Confederate Ranger Robert Martin's plan to burn New York City on November 25, 1864.

The second half highlights the northern partisans. In a charming opening chapter, the author discusses Abraham Lincoln's experience as a ranger. Apparently, his experiences as a member of Captain Elijah Isle's company of Independent Rangers in the Black Hawk War qualify him as such. As a result, Lincoln's name is inscribed in the US Army Ranger Hall of Fame because, "Once a Ranger, Always a Ranger." Union army units such as the Loudon Rangers, the Jessie Scouts, the Snake-Hunters, the Swamp Dragons, and the Blazer Scouts are covered in depth, no matter how obscure they may seem at first. Ranger groups who worked as scouts for the Union army are given a chapter, as are rangers who worked farther west with the military to control violence between Native Americans and settlers.

"Grant's Ranger," C. Lorain Ruggles, is one of the more interesting men individually featured. He was based at the Union camp at Bolivar, Tennessee, and acted as a spy. He could easily pass for a Southerner and did—quite often. The information he was able to deliver to Grant gave the general the advantage many times. Ruggles was quite the character.

Author Robert W. Black is a decorated US Army Ranger colonel who fought in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In 1966 he was assigned to Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (MACV). Together with his Korean War experience Colonel Black saw combat actions in eight campaigns. Twice awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge, he holds the Silver Star, three Bronze Stars (two for valor), the Legion of Merit, the Air Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, and the Vietnam Cross of Honor. Perhaps because he truly understands the role of irregular warfare, Black makes no value judgments concerning any of these partisan groups. Instead, each is

presented clearly and without prejudice—let the readers make up their own minds about the moral implications of the actions of these groups and individuals. Because Black is so fair, I recommend *Yanks and Rebel Rangers* to anyone interested in partisan warfare in general and Civil War partisans specifically.

Meg Groeling received her Master's degree in Military History, with a Civil War emphasis, in 2016, from American Public University. Savas Beatie published her first book, The Aftermath of Battle: The Burial of the Civil War Dead, in the fall of 2015, and she has written First Fallen: The Life of Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, which Savas Beatie will also publish. In addition, she is a regular contributor to the blog Emerging Civil War. She and her husband live with three cats in a 1927 California bungalow covered with roses on the outside and books.