

No Place for Glory: Major General Robert E. Rodes and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg

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Review

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Wynstra, Robert J. *No Place for Glory: Major General Robert E. Rodes and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg.* The Kent State University Press, 2021. HARDCOVER. \$55.00 ISBN 9781606354100 pp. 296

The July 1863 Battle of Gettysburg became a low point in the wartime experiences of many Southern divisions, perhaps most famously that of George Pickett, but Robert Rodes's Division suffered a double helping of humiliation by both repeatedly failing in battle and having its role and sacrifice comparatively ignored by historians and creators of Confederate mythology. Robert Wynstra shines a long-overdue light on both of these issues in his splendid new work. Wynstra begins by introducing brief life stories of the major players in Rodes's Division's: Major General Robert Rodes himself and his brigade chiefs Colonel Edward O'Neal, Brigadier General Alfred Iverson, Brigadier General George P. Doles, Brigadier General Stephen D. Ramseur, and Brigadier General Junius Daniel. Offering insights into their respective personal and command styles and relationships that were tested in the fire of Gettysburg, the author carries many of these relationship details throughout the book. He particularly points to Rodes's failure in effectively organizing and executing the Oak Hill attack on the battle's opening day. Similarly, Rodes's decision that night to call off an attack on the by-then Union held Cemetery Hill—although cheered by most of his men and historians as avoiding pointless loss—nonetheless allowed Meade's commanders time to react and strengthen that key position, ensuring it would never be taken by General Lee's army. Similar leadership failures—from O'Neal's mismanagement to Iverson's possible cowardice—contrast with the actions of Rodes's other brigade heads Doles, Ramseur, and Daniel, whose effective command efforts kept Confederate prospects alive at critical moments in the battle. By highlighting the wavering balance of uneven leadership within Rodes's command, Wynstra demonstrates that leadership breakdowns ultimately undid the fighting determination and sacrifice of legions of the bravest

men, contributing to the South's Gettysburg defeat as surely as did the actions of more popularly famous officers and units.

Providing an engaging, readable narrative that flows easily through the fighting at Gettysburg and beyond, the volume is at its strongest in effectively weaving together the many personal experiences of Rodes's officers and men. Many of these are offered for the first time and are a welcome contribution to Gettysburg's well-trod ground. Wynstra is also to be commended for openly praising the Internet's role in providing access to these stories because doing so risks rebuke by his fellow historians, who in too many cases remain hidebound to valuing only traditional, in-person research. The happy result of this risk is a highly comprehensive, detailed look at the personal experiences of the men in Rodes's Division at Gettysburg.

Similarly, by following the action and contribution of Rodes's brigades in the other various actions in which they participated at Gettysburg, the author provides a "one stop shop" to learn about Rodes's Division's various, often widely scattered contributions. These include detailed coverage of its contribution in driving back the Federal Eleventh Corps on 1 July, its supporting role at Culp's Hill on the second day, and the potential role it might have played had Lee's 3 July attack on the Union center—that made Pickett's Division famous—unfolded differently.

The book's numerous excellent maps further aid readers' understanding of the battle action and movements of Rodes's units, including just the right level of detail. Similarly, illustrations of the key officers and locations mentioned in the text deepen the reader's understanding of the men who comprised Rodes's Division at Gettysburg.

The volume would have benefitted from the inclusion of an order of battle to enable readers to more quickly grasp the various units and their leaders noted in the text, particularly at the regimental level. There also are frequent instances when the volume would have been richer if Wynstra had provided more of his own analysis to explain why he believes events occurred as they did. For example, despite noting that Rodes's Gettysburg performance contrasted with his other actions during the war, particularly leading Jackson's flanking attack at Chancellorsville, he offers no explanation for why this is so. Similarly, the author offers no insight into the long-running quandary about why Rodes selected his least-capable brigade heads, Iverson and O'Neal, to lead the opening attack at Oak Ridge on 1 July.

Even so, this fine volume will find a well-deserved place in the Gettysburg section of every interested reader's bookshelf.

David A. Welker is a professional historian with the US Government and the author of The Cornfield: Antietam's Bloody Turning Point, Tempest at Ox Hill: The Battle of Chantilly, and numerous journal and magazine articles about the Civil War.