

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

Stones River—Bloody Winter in Tennessee, by James Lee McDonough. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1980. pp. xiv, 271. Photographs, maps, bibliography, index. \$14.50.

Civil War enthusiasts will appreciate this compact and well-written account of an important but heretofore neglected battle. The author writes with an informed style; he has previously published books on Union General Schofield and on the Battle of Shiloh. A professor of history at David Lipscomb College, Nashville, he has a special familiarity with his subject from having lived most of his life near the battle site. But this is no provincial study.

McDonough's purpose was to write an up-to-date book that is both scholarly and readable. He convincingly contends that the battle is worth a book: it was every bit as big and bloody as the better known engagement at Shiloh; it opened the Federal campaign into the southeast that ended with Sherman's march to Savannah; it perhaps kept England from recognizing the Confederacy; it restored confidence in the North and discouraged the South; it showed just how bad General Braxton Bragg was as an army leader.

Organizing his work into thirteen short chapters interspersed with clear maps and well-chosen illustrations, McDonough first explains how the battle came to be fought at the out-of-the-way town of Murfreesboro by Stones River. He traces General Rosecrans's Union army as it moves southeast out of Nashville to challenge General Bragg's Confederates in late December of 1862. He recreates the social life in both armies at the Christmas season. Then in greater detail he describes the two-day conflict. At 6 a.m. on December 31, 1862, ten thousand Confederates led off the attack against the Union right "with pile-driving force," driving three divisions for three miles. General Rosecrans was barely able to stem the tide of disaster by the close of the day's fighting. Both armies waited an entire day before resuming combat on January 2, 1863, when a bloody afternoon clash went against the Confederates. The result of the fighting was technically a draw, but the Rebels withdrew from the field. He concludes the book with a chapter of analysis and evaluation.

All this is done with a skillfully wrought balance between narration and interpretation. The story never bogs down into technical or statistical intricacies. The author relies primarily on the *Official Records* for his narration of the action. His interpretation is a synthesis of the work of such authorities as Shelby Foote, K. P. Williams, Bruce Catton, T. L. Connelly, and of course, the biographers of the

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various chieftains on both sides. McDonough himself gives succinct biographical sketches of the principal officers.

What really makes the book a success, however, is McDonough's mastery of anecdotal history. He purposely strives for a "you-are-there" approach by using quotes from letters, diaries, and memoirs of soldiers. The reader vicariously experiences the miseries, frustrations, and occasional humor and heroics of war. There is, for example, the pathos of bands from both armies simultaneously breaking into "Home Sweet Home" on the night before the mass killing began. Certainly, those participants who wrote of "the gruesome scenes amidst the dead and dying and wounded" (p. 128) had no illusions about the glamour of modern warfare. Throughout, McDonough has enlivened his battle account with memorable anecdotes: "An unknown Confederate soldier watched a scared rabbit jump from its hiding place and, with its white tail elevated, scamper to the rear. Gazing wistfully at the little animal, his sad remark was perhaps characteristic of the feelings of a great many others: 'Go it Molly Cotton-tail, go it! I'd run too if I didn't have a reputation to sustain'" (p. 99).

McDonough concludes that because of poor leadership the Confederates missed several opportunities to win a much needed victory. Although Bragg did launch an aggressive attack on the surprised Federals, he failed to press his advantage. Furthermore, he blundered in ordering his units to make frontal assaults in a piecemeal manner. He had obviously learned nothing earlier at Shiloh in costly charges against the Hornet's Nest. "At Stones River he remained wedded to the tactics of the Mexican War which, before the advent of the rifled-musket, had yielded satisfactory results" (p. 222).

The author has indeed achieved his purpose in this accurate, interesting, and useful book. Only minor disagreements with his emphasis in a few places are worth mentioning. It seems he goes too far afield in providing background information, rehashing the old questions of "King Cotton" diplomacy, the Confederate draft law, the failing Southern economy, and remote campaigns in the Eastern Theater. At a few other points, McDonough is perhaps too ready to accept at face value eyewitness accounts written after the event. Overall, however, his selections are just right.

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