

September 2010

War Like the Thunderbolt: The Battle and Burning of Atlanta

by Russell S. Bonds

Westholme Publishing, Yardley, PA (2009)

reviewed by Carole Babyak

This information-packed book begins with the filming of the first scene of *Gone With the Wind*; burning the back lot in Hollywood, which represented the burning of Atlanta. In 1939 the Ebenezer Baptist Church choir sang for the premiere of the movie on Peach Street. The reverend's 10-year-old son, Martin Luther King, sang in the choir.

Jonesboro, a key Railroad link, was the site for the fictional Tara. Leaving this, the book jumps to the Union advance and occupation of Atlanta. You will come to know Gen. Sherman after reading the 402 pages as well as understanding his relationship with Gen. Thomas, who was credited with the victory at Peach Tree Creek—a battle seldom covered in history—thus not revealing Thomas' role.

Insight into Gen. Hood's personality is also included, like the poker game where Hood bet \$2,500 with not a pair in his hand. Col. Benjamin Harrison of the 70th Indiana Regiment saved his commanding officer and was so recognized by Gen. Hooker for promotion. Harrison got a severe case of poison ivy, so he began his habit of wearing gloves and later was known as the kid glove politician. Col. John S. Pemberton, CSA, settled later in Atlanta as a pharmacist, creating hair dye, cough syrup and his brain tonic, which became Coca Cola.

Many more individual incidents are in this book with Sherman's letters to Gen. Hood and the Mayor of Atlanta containing his most memorable quotes. The pros and cons of Sherman's bombing of Atlanta are discussed and the book ends with a quote from Union Gen. James H. Wilson's conversation with the artist who was painting his portrait: "One can't put down history as it really happened – people don't want it – it would shock them. People have formed their own ideas in regard to history and they do not want them dismembered."

October 2010

Touring Civil War Historic Sites in West (western) Virginia with A. Wilson Greene, CEO, Pamplin Historical Park.

by Ray Vanderpool – September 2010

A fellow Civil War traveler told me that his knowledge of the War was an inch deep and a mile wide. If you can absorb the knowledge of the War that Will Greene can teach, you could add another foot to the depth. When the itinerary was developed to visit the Civil War sites in West Virginia (it became the 35th state on June 20, 1863), Will planned the trip by visiting each

location where he arranged the hotels, planned the meals, calculated the travel time between sites, allocated the length of time for each site, and contacted local experts to be on hand to enhance the learning experience. Anyone who wants to learn about the Civil War will not find a better value.

Each day's agenda follows a similar pattern: breakfast at the hotel before 8 a.m., morning briefing beginning at 8 a.m. to set the stage for the day's travel, and bus departure at 9 a.m. Battle sites are visited until lunch, which may be at a local restaurant or field rations at the site so that tour time is maximized. Dinner is between 6 and 7 p.m., usually at a nice restaurant where libations are available, and then back to the hotel at about 8 p.m. A trip with this schedule is not for everyone, but if you want to increase your knowledge beyond an inch, this is a good way to do it. This was the fastest five days of my life.

The five days included visits to the important sites in Civil War West Virginia. We began with Dennis Frye as our guide at Harpers Ferry. He detailed John Brown's 1859 raid and 1862 capture of the site by the Confederates prior to the battle of Antietam. This was followed by a tour of the Shepherdstown battlefield led by a local expert, Tom Clemens. After visits to Romney, Fort Mill Ridge, Moorefield, and Fort Mulligan, we spent most of the next three days visiting battlefields of the 1861 campaign. Local expert and author Hunter Lesser led our visit to the site of the first land battle of the War— Philippi, which was a Union victory. This was followed by tours of Laurel Hill and Rich Mountain battlefields. We followed this by spending a couple of hours in Beverly, a community of 700 people that has more going on than those a hundred times larger. The Beverly Heritage organization (who catered an excellent dinner for our tour group) is saving numerous historical building by applying gifts from donors, grants, and using Americorp personnel. The next day Hunter Lesser led us on tours of Fort Marrow at Elkwater, Cheat Summit Fort, and Camp Allegheny. He also arranged a visit for the group at the historic Traveler's Repose in Bartow. This is a site that Stonewall Jackson and other Confederate Generals visited or made their headquarters. This stop was made special for our group when we were greeted by the current resident, 95 year-old Jesse Powell, who has lived in the home all but two years of her life. Jesse recounted how she sat on her grandfather's lap when he told stories about his participation in the Civil War.

The last full day of the trip included the 1861 campaign in the Kanawha Valley: Big Sewell Mountain, Gauley Bridge, and Carnifex Ferry. The last site we visited was the 1863 battle of Droop Mountain. Our final stop was the Lewisburg Confederate Cemetery where ninety-five soldiers are in a mass burial laid out in the form of a cross, a solemn reminder of the human cost.

Visiting these sites after reading some of the material (a reading list is provided), being guided by Will Greene and the local experts he engaged, and standing where the historic events occurred

cannot be duplicated through any other studies. Surely another small bit of depth has been added to my knowledge of the Civil War.

November 2010

13 Days at Andersonville: The Trial of the Raiders, a Novel

by Phillip J. Tichenor

Charleston, SC (2010)

reviewed by Carole Babyak

This 280 page book takes you into Andersonville Prison Camp, or Camp Sumter as it was originally called, with the main character Lucius, who has just been captured with other men from his regiment. The time is June 24, 1864, the camp is crowded and Lucius observes the conditions of the prisoners and the layout of the camp.

He and a soldier from his home town make a shelter from the sun and rain and become involved in camp life. A group of men named the Raiders steal and beat up the other prisoners; many of these men are from big cities and led a life of thievery before the war.

Prisoners band together, calling themselves Regulators, to capture the Raiders and make them pay for their crimes, which included murder. Lucius was a lawyer before he enlisted, so he is selected to represent the Raiders in a trial permitted by Capt. Wirtz and held outside the camp in July.

The plot is complicated. Lucius constantly thinks about an abolitionist girl back home, his tent mate is involved with the Raiders after finding orders for Jubal Early to raid Washington, DC, and one does not know how all these themes combine until the very last pages.

Lucius and his friend are fictional, but the Raiders and Andersonville are not. The author brings together conflicts about Black men, abolitionists, and the rule of law within Lucius' character. There are illustrations of the Raiders tombstones in the Andersonville cemetery.

This book should stimulate you to read further about Andersonville.

December 2010

The Election of 1860

from notes taken at the Pamplin Park Symposium, October 2010

by Ray Vanderpool

The United States had been on a slippery slope for its entire existence up to the time of the election of the sixteenth president. The country had grown from thirteen states on the east coast

to thirty-three states by 1860 and extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. The nation divided into sections that resulted in the North being more industrial and the South, with a warmer climate, relying on cotton and rice as its economic base. To this end, the South, with some large plantations, had a strong aristocratic minority and used slave labor as their source of manpower while the north employed free people.

The tensions that naturally evolved between the sections were numerous: the South, attempting to protect slavery within its borders, argued that since they agreed to be part of the United States they could secede from it if it wished—disunion was a constant threat. Politically the South fought for balance in the Senate because the North, with about twice the population, controlled the House. The North often agreed to compromises to appease them—in 1820 Missouri was admitted as a slave state while slavery would be prohibited in the other western territories. Compromise was needed again in 1850 when California asked to be admitted as free soil. Throughout this period in the North there was a rapid rise of abolitionist groups who demanded freedom for all American slaves—some argued that the slaves should be returned to Africa while others believed their owners should be compensated for the emancipation of this valuable asset.

There was a constant fear in the South of not only servile insurrection but also increasing agitation from northern abolitionists. A slave uprising occurred in Virginia in 1831 when Nat Turner led a number of bondsmen who killed about sixty whites. During the manic decade of the 1850s, numerous events galvanized southerners to protect their right to secede from the union to preserve their way of life: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) stirred northern passion by depicting the slave's life as a constant nightmare. The Kansas Nebraska Act (1854) allowing for popular sovereignty to determine free or slave resulted in border wars that turned into bloody massacres. In 1857 a South Carolina representative, Preston Brooks, nearly caned to death abolitionist senator Charles Sumner while Sumner was seated in the Senate chamber. The Supreme Court addressed the issue of slavery and race in the *Dred Scott* ruling—a slave had no rights and was not a person. John Brown, a radical abolitionist, in 1859 led a raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in an attempt to lead a servile insurrection; however, his effort was foiled. But in the six weeks before he was hanged, the anti-slavery forces elevated him to martyrdom.

The 1860 election for the sixteenth president of the United States would be the tipping point for the southern radicals. The Democratic Party split into two factions; a splinter party, the Constitutional Union, had a contender, giving the Republican Party an easy Electoral College victory with less than forty percent of the popular vote. Although president-elect Abraham Lincoln's primary concern was preserving the union and no expansion of slavery into new territories, South Carolina and the six other Deep South states were having none of his rhetoric and they seceded from the union before his inauguration. And so it was seven score and ten years ago.

January 2011

On Hallowed Ground: the Story of Arlington National Cemetery

by Robert M. Poole

Walker Publishing Co., New York, NY (2009)

reviewed by Carole Babyak

The author is a writer and editor contributing to Smithsonian and National Geographic Magazines. Many books written about the Civil War examine battles, technology, political and social movements and many draw conclusions about how the conflict affects our modern world. This is such a book.

Arlington National Cemetery's beginning was during the Civil War. General Montgomery Meigs shaped the ritual, reverence and scope of the cemetery. Under his plans unknown soldiers were disinterred from Manassas and other eastern fields with a monument marking their graves. Dedication to returning soldiers for burial and selecting an unknown soldier began during the Civil War.

The author covers Arlington's story from its beginning as Mary Custis Lee's family home to burials from Iraq and Afghanistan. The plane that hit the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, flew low over Arlington and debris landed in the cemetery.

This is a captivating book, relating all events with deserving reverence, and it covers so much of American history. A quote from British Prime Minister William Gladstone at the beginning is especially significant: "Show me the manner in which a nation or a community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals."

February 2011

So You Think You Know ANTIETAM? The Stories Behind America's Bloodiest Day

by James and Suzanne Gindlesperger

John F. Blair Publ., Winston-Salem, NC, 2012. \$19.99

Reviewed by Carole Babyak

This book covers all the monuments on the Antietam Battlefield. The reason and date for the monument is covered, so you not only know the general history of the unit, but when it was dedicated as well as the cost.

Lovely color photographs in all seasons accompany the text, as well as historic photos and engravings.

This book can be read, put down then picked up again to find more information about the memorial.

If you missed William McKinley's monument while touring the battlefield, you can find it in this book and refer to it, sitting in your favorite chair.

Once you know the stories behind the monuments, they will evoke all the reverence one can feel when you visit the field in person. Full of information, this book will not gather much dust on your book shelf.

The Gindlesbergers have also written a similar book, "So You Think You Know Gettysburg." James also wrote, "Fire on the Water," "Escape from Libby Prison," and "Seed Corn of the Confederacy."

March 2011

FAILURE IN THE SADDLE: Nathan Bedford Forrest, Joseph Wheeler, and the Confederate Cavalry in the Chickamauga Campaign

by David A. Powell

Published by Savas Beatie LLC, New York, NY (2010)

reviewed by Mike Miller

The Battle of Chickamauga is remembered as the greatest Confederate victory in the Western Theatre of the American Civil War. However, the campaign as a whole squandered that success as it led to Chattanooga as a permanent Union base and to the dismissal of General Braxton Bragg as the commanding general of the Army of Tennessee. The premise of this book is that Western Theatre historians and thus Civil War enthusiasts have completely blamed Bragg while ignoring the failures of his cavalry corps commanders Nathan Bedford Forrest and Joseph Wheeler.

The Confederate cavalry of 14,000 men was poorly mismanaged throughout the campaign. While the author admits that Bragg was guilty of poor decisions, he claims his lack of preparedness was the fault of Forrest and Wheeler. They failed to be the eyes and ears of Bragg's army due to reporting misleading information, constant insubordination and petty politics. They failed to guard mountain passes and river crossings, most notably when allowing William Rosecrans' Union Army of the Cumberland to take Chattanooga without a fight.

Forrest is accused of not taking orders well, not delegating authority well and being on the front lines fighting when he should have been behind the lines managing his troops. Wheeler is accused of being even worse as he seldom drilled his undisciplined troops. His orders resulted in

his troops and their horses travelling unnecessary miles and often being tired and seldom in the right place at the right time. His jealousy of Bragg and incompetency led to countless errors of judgment.

The author meticulously examines the cavalry involvement in every major and minor battle of the Chickamauga Campaign. He states that "cavalry often dictates how a campaign unfolds and plays out." While David A. Powell does not completely exonerate General Braxton Bragg for the negative results of a winnable campaign, he comes close to doing so.

April 2011

Guns of the Civil War

by Dennis Adler

Minneapolis: Zenith Press (2011), Hardcover, 352 p, 300 color, 150 b/w photos

ISBN: 978 ISBN: 978 ISBN: 978

Reviewed by Dan Welch

Numerous historians and military historians alike have long debated the role of technological improvements on long-arms and firearms and their effect on tactics, strategy, and casualties during the American Civil War. While Dennis Adler's work, *Guns of the Civil War*, sidesteps that debate, it does provide information on the numerous types of weaponry produced for the armed services of both the Union and Confederate armies during the war. Adler notes in the beginning of his work that the majority of firearms produced in the years leading to the Civil War were manufactured in the North and, with the start the war, the South had to rally to begin manufacturing guns and arms of their own.

The author traces the dichotomy of manufacturing and evolution of arms in both the North and South from loose powder cap-and-ball revolvers and rifles to the early development of self-contained metallic cartridges. Adler examines this evolution through such manufacturing companies as Colt, Smith & Wesson, E. Remington & Sons, Whitney, Rogers & Spencer, Manhattan, Savage, and a myriad of others. This work even dedicates a chapter to the evolution of historic reproductions of many of these famous arms from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many of the guns that Adler examines have been all but forgotten to history and have been relegated to little more than footnotes in arms manufacturing of the nineteenth century. Accompanying many detailed descriptions of these weapons are photographs of the weapons themselves. These photographs were assembled from many private collections, archives, and museums.

Despite the numerous weapons discussed and pictured, the book has several deficiencies. First, it has a limited target audience. If you are not a gun "buff," by the time you reach the one hundredth photo of another weapon, even their bright colors will not keep you captivated any

longer. Many of the photos of these weapons have more text about the elaborate backdrops used in the photographs and what historic tavern they were photographed in than the weapons themselves. Additionally, the work provides little text on the actual evolution of the arms and companies that made them, most of it not even cited as to where the information came from. The chapter on modern, historic reproductions smacks of endorsements from Civil War themed gift stores with gold revolvers with paintings of Robert E. Lee and Confederate battle flags emblazoned on them. The biggest fault with Adler's work, however, is the focus on the minutia and not the larger picture. Many of the arms that are photographed and discussed in brevity are ones in which were prototypes, produced in limited numbers, saw little service in the war or affected tactics in any way. If you are looking for a colorful book of photographs for your coffee-table this is the book for you; however, if you are looking for information on arms that affected tactics and the number of casualties on the field of battle, you may want to consider other, more affordable sources.

May 2011

Vicksburg 1863

by Winston Groom

Published by Alfred A. Knopf, NY, NY (2009)

reviewed by Carole Babyak

The author is a Pulitzer Prize Finalist and, although this is a long book, focusing on individual soldiers stories makes this a compelling read. We all know who captured Vicksburg and all the abstract, historic, after-the-war pronouncements about the significance of Gen. Pemberton's surrender.

This book places you with the soldiers, on both sides, and gives a complete picture of the problems Gen. Grant confronted and follows his relationship with Gen. W. T. Sherman and the ousting of Gen. McClellan. Admiral Porter cooperated with Gen. Grant, and the account of ships floating through the swamps is a clear image of what the brown water sailors experienced. Charles Dana was sent to observe Gen. Grant by Edwin Stanton and reported directly to Secy. Stanton. Gen. McClellan (trying to make himself look good) had written Pres. Lincoln that Gen. Grant was drunk and sick, but Dana reported what he saw and took Gen. Grant's side.

The News reporters flocked to McClellan because they were anxious to smear Gen. Sherman because Sherman brought court martial charges against a New York Herald reporter, Thomas Knox. Grant was stoic because he wouldn't divulge his plans and reporters said he was idle, incompetent and unfit to command. Charles Dana found out the truth.

After the war, the Southern Generals involved promoted themselves at the expense of Gen. Pemberton. This story is clarified, mentioning the 1999 discovery at an Ohio Flea Market of Pemberton's official account.

Emotions and loyalties on both sides continued, an example was at the Grand Review—most of Sherman's men would not turn their heads or salute to Halleck's stand.

The formation of Vicksburg National Military Park is at the end of the book. Missouri had monuments to the North and the South. And the Illinois monument cost \$194,423 in the 1890s, or 5 million dollars in today's currency.

The lives of many of the participants are continued, even mentioning Grant's son Fred, who at the age of 12 suffered a leg wound at the Battle of Big Camp. In 1964 the Ironclad Cairo was raised then sunk by mines in 1862. It can be viewed today at Vicksburg. Reading this book will give you a richer picture of Vicksburg and a greater appreciation of the War in the West.