

Combined Operations in the Civil War

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Book Reviews

Michael D. Gibson, Book Review Editor

Combined Operations in the Civil War, by Rowena Reed. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1978. pp. xxiii, 468. Photographs, maps, bibliography, index. \$16.95.

Combined operations at the beginning of the Civil War, operations where army and navy forces had to work together to attain an objective, were characterized by ineptness and confusion. This occurred despite General McClellan's strategy, a strategy dependent on the successful coordination of the two arms.

Rowena Reed's *Combined Operations* traces the ups and downs of the Civil War with emphasis upon theaters where cooperation between naval and army commanders was vital to the success of campaigns. Reed rightly places most emphasis upon Union campaigns to open the Mississippi and attacks against coastal fortifications. The book is divided into three parts. Two sections analyze the evolution of combined operations on the strategic level and the collapse of that strategy. The final part covers the development of combined tactics near the end of the war. Reed does, perhaps, ascribe too much to McClellan's removal as general-in-chief as the prime cause of the failure of a combined-operations strategy. Reed states such a strategy could have won the war in the first two years if it had been successfully pursued. But among the reasons for such failure should also be included the lack of sufficient riverine forces and the loss of able generals to the Confederate side.

The book's sharp photographs and ample maps provide the necessary background for an understanding of the technology and geography involved in the phases of the war Reed analyzes. To take but one example, the maps which accompany the chapters on the operations against Fort Fisher near Wilmington clarify the text and make very evident how a successful combined attack finally took the fort. Reed details throughout the work how lessons learned in earlier operations

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ultimately led to successful combined operations, and states that these lessons were not lost upon later military planners.

Civil War enthusiasts and military historians should find a great deal to interest them in Reed's book. Accounts of operations in the Mississippi Valley, including those which failed to open the river, will be of interest to Mississippi Valley historians. Reed makes the cogent argument that Vicksburg fell not by brilliant planning, but as a result of the situation in which the combatants found themselves. This leads her to suggest that what happens in war often comes out of the pressure of circumstances and only appears in retrospect to have been planned.

This eminently readable book provides an adequate portrayal of the politics and personalities involved and demonstrates how combined operations were affected by other theaters of the war. Although it skips over the tragedy of civil war, and frequently omits the casualty figures, the work has a place in any basic collection of Civil War books.

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The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home, by William C. Davis. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1980. pp. xv, 318. Illustrations, notes, source note, bibliography, index. \$12.95.

The First Kentucky Brigade was one of the most famous units in the Confederate army. Composed largely of Kentuckians who fought tenaciously but were impatient with discipline, the "Orphans" haunted the southern imagination. The unit's association with such noted leaders as John C. Breckinridge, Simon Bolivar Buckner, and John Hunt Morgan added lustre to its reputation.

Organized at Bowling Green in the autumn of 1861, the brigade and its auxiliaries numbered 3,680 men. Three years later the number was well under one thousand, despite the presence of such soldiers as John Mahon who was wounded five times but always recovered in time for the next battle. Some Tennessee and Alabama troops were a part of the brigade until November 1863, when it became an all Kentucky unit. Its history was confused for several months in 1862 when it was divided and each part claimed to be the First Kentucky Brigade.

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