The Battle of Shiloh and the Organizations Engaged

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Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site

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Few Civil War units can offer a travel log equal to that of the soldiers of the Twenty-second Iowa Infantry, so it is fitting that their actions are finally enumerated on paper. Samuel D. Pryce, author of Vanishing Footprints, served in the regiment, and the Twenty-second Iowa Regimental Association veterans even voted his book to be their official record. The regiment began its service in Missouri before serving in the Vicksburg Campaign and later in Louisiana and then in Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley. Despite a captivating story and the veterans’ endorsement, Pryce’s manuscript was never published, possibly because it was 827 pages long, much of it unrelated to the war. Fortunately, editor Jeffry C. Burden has cut away all the fluff and produced a concise and important history of the regiment.

Vanishing Footprints is a combination of published memoir and regimental history. As in the case of almost all postwar memoirs, however, the reader must remember that the work was written after the fact and can be tinged with the worldview of the writer. Nonetheless, Civil War historians and buffs in general, as well as Iowans in particular, will be pleased with this handsome publication. The volume should be especially interesting to Johnson County Iowans, as seven of the ten companies in the regiment hailed from that locale.


Reviewer Brian K. McCutchen began his National Park Service career as a ranger/historian at Shiloh and now serves as National Park Superintendent of the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, Stanton, North Dakota.

Colonel David W. Reed — familiar to Iowa Civil War historians as distinguished veteran of the 12th Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment, and widely regarded as “father” of the Shiloh National Military Park — published The Battle of Shiloh and the Organizations Engaged in 1902. This small but meticulous book — constructed entirely from official records, veteran input, and a vivid familiarity with the cultural landscape of the period — quickly became the “bible” of the 1862 battle. Subsequent editions, with revisions, followed in 1909 and 1913.

The first major book about Shiloh, Reed’s account served as the cornerstone for all Shiloh interpretation for almost 70 years. Although generally balanced, The Battle of Shiloh is not entirely without romanticism and lore. Folklore such as the “Sunken Road,” the “Hornets Nest,” and the “Bloody Pond,” as well as the idolization of General
Benjamin Prentiss as hero of the Hornets Nest all were proliferated by Reed and his contemporaries.

Timothy Smith should be lauded for bringing about the republication of this history. His introduction provides an enlightening account of noted Iowan David W. Reed, his involvement with the battle, and his invaluable direction in the battlefield’s preservation, commemoration, and long-term interpretation. Smith’s inclusion (PDF files on CD-ROM) of the four large maps that accompanied the original publication is of great benefit.

For the Shiloh researcher looking for an account of the battle from the earliest of testimonials and from the veteran perspective, _The Battle of Shiloh and Organizations Engaged_ should be a staple of reference.


Reviewer Samuel Graber is Lilly Fellow and lecturer in the humanities at Valparaiso University. His dissertation (University of Iowa, 2008) is “Twice-Divided Nation: The Civil War and National Memory in the Transatlantic World.”

Every April throngs of Iowans explore the Civil War era at the festivities surrounding Keokuk’s Battle of Pea Ridge Reenactment, where audiences listen to speeches by impersonators, watch “living historians” demonstrate the intricacies of Civil War medicine, and enjoy a dramatic reenactment staged on land no real Civil War battle ever touched. The popularity of such events testifies to the intensity and variety of Civil War memory. In a state with no major battle site, it seems one can still be invented.

Iowa readers will find similarly intriguing reenactments of the war in _Memory and Myth_, a wide-ranging collection of 25 short essays culled from more than a decade’s worth of conference papers. The pieces are organized into sections on antebellum writers and slavery, the war years and their aftermath, modern writers’ responses to the war, and cinematic and televised representations. The essays locate myths and memories of the war within histories, novels, newspapers, autobiographies, and film. Although somewhat uneven in quality, they display an intellectual flexibility befitting a diverse authorship that includes media scholars, English professors, historians, and even poets.

In its scope and loose organization, _Memory and Myth_ reflects the complexity that makes Civil War memory both beguiling and frustrating. The war seems to be remembered everywhere in American