Price's Lost Campaign: The 1864 Invasion of Missouri

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Readers familiar with the recent scholarship on John Brown will find in *Midnight Rising* no great new insights on such familiar topics as Brown’s alleged insanity, his Old Testament religious faith, or whether or not he was a “proto-terrorist.” What they will find is a highly readable narrative of John Brown and the Harpers Ferry raid, with fresh insights into the personalities and character of Brown’s family and associates. It is a welcome addition to the ever-growing John Brown bookshelf.


Reviewer Terry L. Beckenbaugh is assistant professor of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. His dissertation (University of Arkansas, 2001) was “The War of Politics: Samuel Ryan Curtis, Race, and the Political/Military Establishment.”

Mark Lause’s *Price’s Lost Campaign: The 1864 Invasion of Missouri* is a welcome addition to the University of Missouri Press’s Shades of Blue and Gray series. Lause’s study is a detailed narrative of the 1864 campaign up to the point that Major General Sterling Price’s rebel Army of Missouri turned away from Jefferson City, Missouri. That narrative does much to debunk the myths that surround Confederate forces during the Civil War, namely that they respected private property and eschewed the “Hard War” tactics embraced by the Union army that devastated the Confederate states. Price’s forces not only routinely looted Missouri citizens but murdered many in cold blood. Most of these actions were not borne of military necessity—certainly not the killings of civilians and prisoners of war. The Confederate Army of Missouri left in its wake a bloody trail of corpses and ransacked homes and businesses, hardly the benevolent liberating army of neo-Confederate myth. Lause also harshly assesses the Federal commander of the Department of Missouri, Major General William S. Rosecrans. According to Lause, Rosecrans was more concerned with protecting the business interests in Missouri than with protecting that state’s citizens from Price’s forces. Rosecrans also reacted with deplorable slowness to the threat, and did little to coordinate with the Department of Kansas’s commander, Iowan Major General Samuel Ryan Curtis.
Unfortunately, Lause ends *Price's Lost Campaign* in mid-stride. The decision to use the word *invasion* in the subtitle is significant: Lause argues forcefully that the campaign was no raid, but that the intent was to “liberate” Missouri from Federal rule (2). That editorial decision influences the rest of the book, because Lause abruptly ends the study when the Confederates turned away from Jefferson City in early October 1864. His rationale is that when the Army of Missouri veered west from Jefferson City, it ceased to be an invasion and turned into a raid. From a military terminology standpoint, that is correct. However, this account may leave the reader unsatisfied because Lause ignores the fighting around Westport on October 21–23, 1864, as well as the pursuit after that battle—including the Battle of Mine Creek on October 25. The Battle at Westport was the biggest battle of the Civil War in the trans-Mississippi, and the fight at Mine Creek was one of the largest cavalry battles of the war. The omission of those two clashes will therefore be a disappointment to readers who expect the study to examine the entire campaign.

Beyond this truncated account of the struggle, the lack of good maps is the book’s most significant shortcoming. Such maps are almost essential for readers to comprehend the swirl of events taking place throughout the campaign.

Despite these weaknesses, *Price's Lost Campaign* is a significant addition to the historiography of the Civil War in the trans-Mississippi. The author strips away much of the myth surrounding Price’s invasion with in-depth research and analysis. We can hope that Lause will follow up with a second volume examining the rest of the campaign in similar detail. If a showman is supposed to leave his audience wanting more, then Lause has succeeded admirably.


Reviewer Donald R. Shaffer teaches exclusively online for Upper Iowa University and other institutions. He is the author of *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (2004) and (with Elizabeth Regosin) *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files* (2008).

*Freedom by the Sword*, by William A. Dobak, brings yet another perspective to the service of African Americans in the U.S. Civil War. Once a marginal topic, black Union soldiers have been the subject of