

History Counts: A New Medley Of Facts Challenges Some Older Accounts

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Review

HISTORY COUNTS

A new medley of facts challenges some older accounts

Garrison, Webb

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Vandiver, Frank E. *1001 Things Everyone Should Know about the Civil War.* Doubleday, ISBN 385473850

Frank Vandiver does an admirable job of placing in chronological order the many significant events of the Civil War in such short space. **1001 Things** rarely wastes words and has achieved balance by treating naval, civilian, and medical matters in addition to purely military aspects of the war.

Layout of **1001 Things** (two columns per page) is superb. It includes many illustrations, some of which have seldom been used before. Unfortunately, many are a bit fuzzy and they carry no credit lines. The comprehensive index greatly adds to usefulness, and clear typography plus lots of white space make for easy reading.

The author sometimes challenges orthodoxy, but limited space makes it impossible to buttress verdicts such as the assertion that Beauregard probably saved Richmond in the summer of 1864 "because he grasped the tactical situation more quickly than Lee did." Vandiver sometimes indulges in guessing. For example, he says that Albert S. Johnston "probably died at the right moment for his reputation."

There are provocative paragraphs such as the author's description of Raphl Semmes, followed by terse characterization that begins: "He had a gentleman's manners but a corsair's heart. . . ." Readers will also be pleased to discover that new terminology can be effective. Describing part of First Bull Run, Vandiver does not write of Union or Federal or blue-clad cannoneers -- but simply, Blue cannoneers.

He relies too heavily upon oral tradition in item #924, however, where General Joseph Hooker's policies are said to have given rise to "hooker" as a synonym for "prostitute." At least as early as 1859 a strumpet who lived at Corlear's Hook in New York City was termed a hooker in print.

Unfortunately, the title seems to have dictated the structure of the work. Numerous numbers for "things everyone should know" crop up inside paragraphs. Single sentences deal with some things that should be known, and the author treats one of them (#211) in eight words. This makes it hard to avoid the conclusion that lots of numbers (but not sections of text indicated by them) could be deleted without damaging the work.

Reared in Covington, Georgia, where Garrard hit in July 1864, Webb Garrison's interest in the Civil War began in childhood...and never stops growing.