

The Picture Of Confederate Gray: Album Portrays Leading Confederate Generals In Image And Anecdote

Wilbur E. Meneray

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Meneray, Wilbur E. (2001) "The Picture Of Confederate Gray: Album Portrays Leading Confederate Generals In Image And Anecdote," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.3.1.26

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol3/iss1/26>

Review

THE PICTURE OF CONFEDERATE GRAY

Album portrays leading Confederate generals in image and anecdote

Meneray, Wilbur E.

Winter 2001

Cantor, George *Confederate Generals: Life Portraits*. Taylor Publishing Co. (TX), 2000-09-01. ISBN 878331794

George Cantor twice refers to Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg: once as "one of the great feats of valor in all of American warfare," and later as "a display of courage rarely equaled in the history of warfare." The author himself displays courage in selecting only 16 Confederate generals to highlight in his new work, **Confederate Generals: Life Portraits**.

Civil War historians and buffs will surely have favorites among the 425 men listed in Ezra T. Warner's *Generals in Gray* that Cantor has omitted. He divides the chosen 16 into five groups: "The Legends" are Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Joseph Johnston, and James Longstreet; "The Cavalrymen" comprise Jeb Stuart, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and John Hunt Morgan; "The Western Commanders" are Albert Sidney Johnston, John Bell Hood, and Patrick Cleburne; and "The Difficult Men" are Jubal Early, Braxton Bragg, and Robert Toombs. Lastly, "The Eccentrics," are P.G.T. Beauregard, Leonidas Polk, and George Pickett.

If few will question most of his selections, choices such as Toombs and Pickett may leave readers wondering why Cantor does not explain the basis for their inclusion and classification in his introduction. In most cases the reason is obvious; in other cases less so. Beauregard and Polk are not "eccentric" in the eyes of the people of New Orleans. They fit in there!

An experienced newspaperman for *The Detroit News* with more than 20 books to his credit, Cantor provides the general reader with a well-written introduction to the life and times of notable Confederate leaders. His life portraits provide a sense of the subject's character, pre-Civil War career and

family history, and activity during the War and in postwar society. In addition to covering the major military achievements or shortcomings of the generals, he highlights the events that may have shaped each individual's historical reputation. Fine examples are found in the treatment of Forrest's involvement in the Fort Pillow massacre and later the Ku Klux Klan, and Longstreet's postwar affiliation with the Republican party and his "attack" upon Lee.

Cantor has a keen journalistic eye for the proper quote or pithy phrase to encapsulate an individual or event. His life portraits clearly show the impact that friendships, army service, and domestic politics had upon many of the Confederate generals. He enlivens the narrative by adding asides throughout the text. By relating what Mark Twain said about Helena, Arkansas, the home of Cleburne, or suggesting that Harriet Beecher Stowe may have been inspired to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin* after a visit to Albert Johnston's Kentucky home, Cantor sparks the reader's interest.

Extensive illustrations show the accelerated aging effect of warfare upon the generals and their antagonists and allies. The battle scenes from the Mexican War and the Civil War, however, are too numerous and do not provide much additional understanding. Image captions read like narrative, making it difficult at first to determine what is being shown. After becoming adjusted to the pattern, however, it is a refreshing change from regular captions.

Cantor culls information from the standard works, and from some more recent works as well. For instance, he relies heavily upon William Piston's biography of Longstreet, yet he does not seem to have consulted recent works on Lee or James Robertson's biography of Jackson. Even the older standards such as Charles Roland's work on Albert Johnston or T. Harry Williams's biography of Beauregard are not cited in the text or the bibliography. Overall, Cantor's work reveals little new research. For example, most of the information in his essay on Jackson can be found in Douglas S. Freeman's sketch in the *Dictionary of American Biography* (1943) and James Robertson's essay in the *American National Biography* (\$2951.50 set).

This volume, which lacks footnotes, might not serve those desiring a more scholarly, interpretative work. But for one unfamiliar with the Civil War and its generals, **Confederate Generals** is an excellent introduction.

Wilbur E. Meneray is assistant dean for special collections at Tulane University. He is past president of the Louisiana Historical Association and serves on the board of the Memorial Hall Museum. He has received the Charles L. Dufour Award for contributions to Civil War history from the New Orleans Civil War Roundtable.