

Bushwhacking on a Grand Scale: The Battle of Chickamauga, September 18-20, 1863

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Review

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White, William Lee *Bushwhacking on a Grand Scale: The Battle of Chickamauga, September 18-20, 1863*. Savas Beatie, \$12.95 ISBN 9781611211580

A New Study of a Vicious Battle

Although the battle of Chickamauga ranks as the second largest battle of the Civil War, relatively little has been written about it. Union Brigadier General John Turchin wrote that the battle was similar to “bushwhacking on a grand scale,” a reflection of how the heavily wooded environment caused the battle to degenerate into a “soldier’s fight” (p. xv). Few people other than William Lee White were more qualified to write this book. He has lifelong ties to the battlefield—literally. Born in an area hospital that sits on part of the battlefield, White’s interest in the battle has been nearly life-long. His employment as a National Park Service ranger at the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park for the past thirteen years has further deepened his knowledge of the battle.

This title is part of Savas Beatie’s rapidly growing *Emerging Civil War Series* “that offers compelling easy-to-read overviews” (back cover). It is also a guidebook with suggested tour stops on the battlefield. Readers who desire a detailed tactical look at the battle will not find it in this book, but those who want a relatively quick read with a level of detail that is more intermediate will appreciate many of the book’s features.

Divided into sixteen chapters, the first chapter summarizes Union Major General William S. Rosecrans’ 1863 summer campaign that captured Chattanooga, Tennessee, and pushed General Braxton Bragg’s Army of Tennessee into Georgia. The next fifteen chapters concentrate entirely on the battle of Chickamauga. Each short chapter describes the action during a particular phase, then narrows the focus to what happened at that tour stop. Next, a clear set of driving instructions with GPS coordinates is given to the next tour

stop. Although I was unable to road test the tour, it seems logically arranged and balanced between the two main days of fighting. The National Park Service's auto tour has eight stops that focus on the September 20th fighting; White's tour has one stop devoted to the September 18th fighting, six stops for the struggle on September 19th, and eight stops for the last day of action.

Alternatively, one can simply read the book as a history of the battle. All the topics that you would expect to find are here such as the outbreak of fighting at Alexander's Bridge, the rapid escalation of the battle on September 19th, the dramatic Confederate breakthrough on September 20th, and the stubborn Union defense of Snodgrass Hill where Major General George H. Thomas earned his nickname, the "Rock of Chickamauga." One map shows the suggested driving tour, and seven maps depict battle action to the brigade level. The narrative frequently discusses actions of individual units, and a number of soldier quotes add color, and sometimes humor, to the text.

The book is packed with approximately 239 black and white illustrations, many of them small format photographs. Wartime photographs of people mentioned in the text are frequent along with modern images of monuments and the battlefield. Four helpful appendices are included: one about the movement of General James Longstreet's Army of Northern Virginia troops from Virginia to Georgia, another about civilians that lived in the area during the battle, an essay about "Chickamauga in Memory," and an Order of Battle. Regrettably there is no index and no notes. Often, though, enough clues about authorship are given so that an interested reader can track down the source of quotations, however, some would be challenging to track down especially for a person unfamiliar with the literature. Typographical errors occasionally mar the flow of the narrative, but as a whole this is a well done history/guidebook of the battle. At \$12.95, this book surely represents one of the best current bargains in Civil War literature.

M. Jane Johansson is Professor of History at Rogers State University and is currently editing the papers of an officer that served in the First Indian Home Guards. Her two previous Civil War books, Peculiar Honor: A History of the 28th Texas Cavalry, 1862-1864 and Widows by the Thousand: The Civil War Correspondence of Theophilus and Harriet Perry, 1862-1864 focused on the trans-Mississippi Confederacy.