

The Civil War in Missouri: A Military History

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Review

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Gerteis, Louis *The Civil War in Missouri: A Military History*. University of Missouri Press, \$29.95 ISBN 9780826219725

A Look at Conventional Warfare in a Guerrilla Area

Professor Louis S. Gerteis writes in *The Civil War in Missouri*, that although guerrilla warfare in Missouri has been thoroughly studied (and he does not dispute its importance), the state's conventional battles also played an important role in Missouri's, and the nation's, history during the war. Gerteis also contends one cannot fully understand the unconventional warfare in Missouri without studying its major battles. He asserts that conventional and unconventional warfare are linked and their relationship is misunderstood (or ignored) by many historians past and present. Gerteis's book sets out to correct this oversight and it delivers what it promises. *The Civil War in Missouri* is the first book length treatment of the Civil War in Missouri which focuses on both the conventional battles and the guerrilla warfare that took place within the state. Sometimes his narrative spills the boundaries of the state of Missouri, into Arkansas mostly, but this is understandable and does not take away any from the over-all effectiveness of the work.

Gerteis, a Professor of History at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, has written by-in-large a very readable and well documented book enhanced by its well-placed maps and pictures. Many readers, who are not familiar with the history and geography of Missouri, will find the maps very useful and strategically placed.

The chapters in the book are chronologically arranged and the first chapter, "Your First Allegiance," sets the stage for the ones to follow. At the beginning of the war, Missouri like other border states, most notably Kentucky, knowing it would be a battleground for states north and south of it, tried a role of armed neutrality, which President Lincoln wisely rejected. He knew, like many other

Union men, that armed neutrality would do nothing more than buy time for Confederate forces in the state to organize.

If there is one fault with this otherwise fine work, it is the author's obsession with detailing many unimportant facts. It is not necessary to know a biography of every character who walked onto the stage of this drama. Detailing their state of origin or when they graduated from West Point sometimes overburdens the narrative.

But Gerteis really shines in his descriptions of battles, the strategies of opposing generals, and the battles consequences. It is this writing that generally strengthens his arguments and makes his thesis convincing (the importance of major battles in Missouri to the state's and nation's history).

Many Civil War enthusiasts will find Gerteis's description of the role Missouri played in river warfare early in the war informative. Because of its location, Missouri controlled both the upper Mississippi and lower Missouri Rivers, and to a large extent over-land passage to New Mexico and California. Missourians, especially James B. Eads and his Carondelet boat works, basically built the Union's brown water navy, which played a critical role in the Union's early success in the western theatre of war and kept Missouri in the Union. Gerteis deftly shows the role Missouri and Missourians played in winning the battles of Forts Henry and Donaldson, New Madrid, and Island Number Ten. These decisive Union victories opened the entire mid-South to Union control which eventually made possible the capture of Nashville, Memphis, the victories at Shiloh and Vicksburg and the eventual control of the Mississippi River.

Gerteis introduces many characters who played important roles in Missouri during the Civil War years. Many, such as Ulysses S. Grant, John C. Fremont, and Henry Halleck, went onto play bigger roles on a much wider stage, while some, such as James and Frank James, William (Bloody Bill) Anderson, and William Quantrill, became infamous.

Gerteis ends his book (chapter six "He Saw the Rebellion Vanishing before Him") with the end of organized Confederate military operations in Missouri in October 1864, although, guerrilla warfare continued in Missouri well after the end of the war in a very limited way. A brief Conclusion ends the book detailing what happened to many of the participants after hostilities ended.

This book is much overdue and covers a previously neglected area of Civil War history. Many will find the work, highly readable, interesting, and after reading it, will come away more knowledgeable of the role Missouri and Missourian played in the war.

Jack Becker is an Associate Librarian at Texas Tech University with a Master's degree in American History. His interests are diverse and include the Civil War, Native Americans, the American West, and Agricultural history. He has edited or co-authored books on cotton, Georgia O'Keeffe, and James Bond.