

Price's Lost Campaign: The 1864 Invasion of Missouri

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Review

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Lause, Mark A. *Price's Lost Campaign: The 1864 Invasion of Missouri.* University of Missouri Press, \$29.95 ISBN 978-0-8262-1949-7

Analyzing Price's Leadership in Missouri

In early September 1864 an army commanded by Sterling Price crossed the northern border of Arkansas and entered Missouri hoping it could undo the effects of two years of Federal political and military dominance of the state. After a fierce engagement at Pilot Knob that compelled a Union force commanded by Thomas Ewing to abandon Fort Davidson, the Confederates advanced to within fifty miles of St. Louis before turning west toward Jefferson City. After failing to overcome Federal defenses at the state capital, Price's men continued pushing west until Union forces commanded by the much-underappreciated Samuel Curtis and oft-maligned Alfred Pleasonton defeated them in hard-fought battles at Westport and the Little Blue River on October 23. After suffering another bad defeat a few days later at Mine Creek, what was left of Price's badly depleted force limped back to Arkansas leaving behind a Missouri in which Federal command of the state was even firmer than before the grand expedition began.

Despite its undeniable importance in the history of the war in the Trans-Mississippi and the scale and scope of the operation (Westport saw more troops participate than any other battle west of the great river) Price's 1864 operations in Missouri have not attracted a great deal of attention from historians. To be sure, the conflict in Missouri has been the subject of a number of studies the past few decades; however, these works have tended to focus on the events of the first year of the war that resulted in the expulsion of pro-Southern political leaders and military forces from the state and the guerrilla war that ravaged it throughout the conflict. Until now, those interested in the 1864 campaign have primarily had to rely on Howard N. Monnett's *Action Before Westport, 1864*, which was published in 1964 by the Westport Historical

Society. While a fine work that provided a solid overview of the overall campaign, Monnett's study, reflecting the fact that it was written in part to support preservation and interpretative efforts around Westport, as a matter of course focused mainly on the events around modern Kansas City that culminated in the battles of October 23.

Thus, there has been a compelling, if not pressing, need for a new study of this campaign, one that not only provides a more thorough account of the entire campaign than Monnett's, but also incorporates insights on the military and political dynamics that shaped the conduct of the Civil War in general and the war in the Trans-Mississippi in particular contained in modern scholarship on those subjects. It is a need that Mark A. Lause's *Price's Lost Campaign: The 1864 Invasion of Missouri* admirably, though only partially, fills.

One of Lause's main objectives is to demonstrate that previous students of the subject have erred in labeling Price's expedition a "raid." Rather, he argues Confederate objectives were much grander than suggested by the term "raid" and that both sides accepted the use of that term in an attempt to downplay their own failings in its course. Indeed, another of Lause's main themes is how poorly just about every leader tasked with leading and responding to Price's incursion into Missouri performed. In the case of Price, Lause is treading a well-worn path, for it is the rare objective student of the campaign or Price's career in general who has found much worthy of admiration in the Confederate leader's performance in 1864. Yet, Lause also offers the reader a less-than-admiring portrait of William S. Rosecrans, commander of Union forces in St. Louis, as a man who was insufficiently impressed by the scale of the Confederate expedition, oddly ineffective in responding to it, and seemingly much more concerned with catering to the city's business interests in their dealings with disgruntled workers than dealing with the rebels. For those who still believe in hoary myths of a chivalrous and honorable Confederacy, Lause also provides unflinchingly honest accounts of the barbarous conduct of Price's men as they moved through Missouri. Yet, he also notes, there was a poetic justice in that knowledge of the thuggery of the Confederates played no small part in the bitter resistance Ewing's men put up at Pilot Knob and Unionists demonstrated at Jefferson City.

For all its merits, though, Lause's account of the campaign is ultimately incomplete. He ends the narrative at Jefferson City and makes only passing mention of the marching and fighting that followed west of the state capital. Moreover, in any work of military history, especially one that gets into the level

of operational and tactical detail that this one does, good maps are essential. Lamentably, only two are provided here and those are inadequate in terms of detail and scope for those needing visual assistance for their efforts to follow the narrative.

Still, on the whole, this is an effective study and a worthy addition to the University of Missouri Press's distinguished Shades of Blue and Gray series. Lause provides a level of operational and tactical detail on the 1864 campaign that is impressive, compelling, and has heretofore been missing from the literature, while offering analyses of men and events that are sober, balanced, and persuasive. It will be the rare reader who finishes this book without hoping that Lause will continue his research and tell the rest of the story of this great campaign in the lamentably oft-neglected Trans-Mississippi.

Ethan S. Rafuse is professor of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He received his Ph.D. in history and political science at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and is the author, editor, or co-editor of eight books, including McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union and Robert E. Lee and the Fall of the Confederacy, 1863-1865.