

### The Confederate Heartland: Military and Civilian Morale in the Western Confederacy

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## Review

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**Clampitt, Bradley R.** *The Confederate Heartland: Military and Civilian Morale in the Western Confederacy*. Louisiana State University Press, \$39.95 ISBN 978-0-8071-3995-0

### The Will to Go On

Pick up any history of the Civil War, and at some point a discussion of morale comes into play, especially in reference to the western theater of the conflict. We are reminded time and again of the waves of Confederate desertion in the face of a lost war and the myriad other reasons why men in the Army of Tennessee had to stop believing in the cause. The concept is taken at face value that in the wake of near constant defeat, the men of the main western army must have suffered from low morale by 1864. Often, historians will cite a letter here, or a diary entry there, to reinforce this belief and then move quickly on. Bradley R. Clampitt's new book, *The Confederate Heartland: Military and Civilian Morale in the Western Confederacy*, seeks to fill the lacuna in scholarship that allows this wide-spread misconception to continue.

Clampitt's work studies the final sixteen months of the war in the West through the writings of soldiers and civilians from Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi. The author works chronologically, breaking the period into two month increments. Each segment centers on an important set of events within that specified time period, such as the evangelical revivals in the early spring of 1864, the summer campaign for, and eventual fall of, Atlanta, and Hood's ill-fated Tennessee campaign. *Confederate Heartland* discusses the effect of each of these events, in, turn on the collective morale of the military and civilian worlds of the Confederacy.

The combined study of military and civilian *mentalité* is central to the development of *Confederate Heartland*. As Clampitt notes in his introduction, "This study is not a military narrative that portrays warfare as though it occurred

in a vacuum without greater social and political consequences. Nor is it an extreme example of new social history that might somehow examine the Civil War without actually noticing that battles were fought and people were killed" (1). While the introduction does an excellent job of placing his work within the current historiographical trends, the author also reinforces his work by placing it within the historical context of such debates as the effect of Joseph E. Johnston's replacement by John Bell Hood. Neither the battlefield nor the home front is ignored in the development of Clampitt's investigation of the factors that influenced Confederate morale in the operational area of the Army of Tennessee. Each influenced the other in any number of ways, as did the fighting in Virginia, as the author notes at various points. All of these factors combined to create and define the morale so vital to continuing the war.

Clampitt's thesis is that those who lived and served in the West did not suffer a constant and deepening demoralization from late 1863 forward, as earlier historical works and the popular imagination would have us believe. Rather, while morale ebbed and flowed within the context of events during 1864, it stayed at a rather high level until the devastating end of Hood's Tennessee Campaign. Yet, even in the face of crushing defeat at Franklin and Nashville, a sense of honor and loyalty fueled soldier and civilian alike, helping to maintain the cause of Confederate independence, as well as unit cohesion. While there is some discussion later in the book about desertion from the Army of Tennessee, it is not as developed as one might like. More than likely, this is from a lack of available resources, since those who did desert the army rarely left a clear and cohesive written record of their thoughts and motivations for leaving the common cause of their family and friends.

*Confederate Heartland* achieves a worthy goal in adding to the broad historiography of the Civil War. Clampitt's study of those living in Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi, as well as those who served in the Army of Tennessee, the main force charged with protecting the region, gives the reader a deeper understanding of the actual effect of combat and many other factors on the morale of the region. Bradley R. Clampitt's well-researched and well-written narrative sheds new light on the mythos of the western Confederate who fought on despite knowing for a year that they were defeated. That was not the case after all; it was not until John Bell Hood destroyed his army at Franklin and Nashville that his men and their families struggled to find the will to go on.

*Dr. Robert Welch is a recent graduate of Iowa State University's Agricultural History and Rural Studies program. His doctoral research looked at the intersection of agricultural change in Georgia during the Civil War and foraging during Sherman's Savannah Campaign.*