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Richard A. Sauers. *Meade: Victor of Gettysburg.* Washington, D. C.: Potomac Books, 2003. xv + 123 pp. $19.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57488-418-0; $12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57488-749-5.

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"New Interpretations" of "One of the Civil War's Most Famous and Misunderstood Generals"

George Gordon Meade will be forever linked with the Civil War's most famous battle, as the man who achieved victory at Gettysburg. Yet, over time, Meade has been relegated to second-class status in the general history of that war. Completely overshadowed by the Civil War's more famous and flamboyant commanders, such as Lee, Grant, Sherman and Sheridan, Meade has never received his proper due. Ironically, it was his victory at Gettysburg that both elevated Meade's fame and, at the same time, forever stained his reputation.

A professional soldier, Meade was deliberate and thorough, and possessed an unshakeable resolve. Considered by many of his contemporaries to be a solid leader, he was unpretentious and stoutly loyal, and he always put the needs of his country before his own. However, his volatile temper and blunt truthfulness, combined with disgruntled backbiting generals and Washington politicians, eventually led to the ambiguous and conflicting appraisal of Meade's military ability.

Until now, he has been the subject of only three full-length biographies, which have provided unequal treatment of the general's life and accomplishments. The first two of these, while adequate in their own right, were written by authors whose objectivity must be questioned. *The Life of General George Gordon Meade, Commander of the Army of the Potomac* (1897) was authored by Meade's nephew, Richard M. Bache. The second biography, *General Meade* (1901), was written by fellow Pennsylvanian Isaac R. Pennypacker. The most complete and most recent biography is Freeman Cleaves's *Meade of Gettysburg* (1960). "Although much better than the previous two biographies," notes Richard Sauers, "Cleaves made a number of factual errors; his book would also have been better with more research in other archival collections" (p. 115).

It is obvious; therefore, that George Gordon Meade deserves a more thorough study. In this case, Richard Sauers delivers exactly what he advertises, a "concise but authoritative account" of Meade's life and career (quoted from the dust jacket). While the book only numbers 109 pages, it does an excellent job of covering the "salient features of General Meade's life" (p. xi). The emphasis, rightly so, is placed on Meade's role during the Civil War, with eight of the book's ten chapters devoted to that topic. The narrative is accurate and it is obvious that Sauers possesses a wealth of knowledge on his subject. His writing style is fairly easy to read and comprehend. Three excellent maps and seven photographs, of the most important personalities associated with Meade and his military career, accompany the narrative. The book is divided into a preface, a chronology, ten chapters, notes, a biographic note, and an index.

The main reason for the book's brevity is that it is part of the Brassey's Military Profiles series. While this series provides "essential treatments of the lives of significant military figures from ancient times through the present" it also has a pre-set page limit and thus is considered only "a starting point for those who wish to pursue a more advanced study of the subject" (quoted from the dust jacket). Despite this, Sauers provides a very good overview of the numerous and varied events that Meade encountered, his role in those incidents and his impact upon them. His descriptions of each are concise, yet clear enough, that even those readers with limited knowledge of the Civil War will easily understand and follow the narrative.

The best section of the book is Sauers's coverage of Meade's role in the Gettysburg Campaign and the subsequent affects it had upon him. This should not be sur-

prising as Sauers's earlier study, *Gettysburg: The Meade-Sickles Controversy* (2003) is considered the authority on this subject. This episode, the most famous event of Meade's career, is also the very reason for his stained reputation. Sauers's narrative concisely covers the most important events and personalities (such Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles, the members of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, and others) associated with this affair. The author clearly explains how these events and individuals combined to sully Meade's military standing, writing: "the voluminous testimony [from the JCCW] and related newspaper articles served to damage Meade's reputation at the time and … provided subsequent uncritical historians of the battle with gist for writing their own inaccurate versions of Gettysburg" (pp. 69-70).

Sauers concludes, quite correctly, that "this mass of often vituperative literature has clogged up the true story of Gettysburg" thus robbing Meade of the credit he rightfully deserved (pp. 69-70). Sauers also ably describes how the negative press coverage and Ulysses Grant's 1864 promotion over Meade further blemished the latter's reputation. It is no surprise, therefore, that Meade wrote to his wife later in the war, "I don't believe the truth will ever be known, and I have a great contempt for History" (quoted, p. 102).

Sauers's coverage of the remainder of Meade's Civil War service, both before and after Gettysburg, is also excellent. This includes his role in the Seven Days where he was wounded at Glendale), Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville; his independent but disappointing campaigns at Bristoe Station and Mine Run; the 1864 Overland Campaign; and the Petersburg and Appomattox campaigns. Meade's role during the last two campaigns is especially well done and provides the first historically accurate version of this subject.

There are some minor problems with the book, though certainly not enough to dissuade a potential reader. While Sauers's knowledge of the subject is obvious, his narrative of various episodes and events is, in some places, completely lacking in the proper citation of sources. In many places, he only provides footnotes for direct quotes. This is not to say Sauers's descriptions are inaccurate, far from it, but the serious student of the war will probably want to know where the author got his information. Furthermore, his bibliography is actually only a "Bibliographic Note" which briefly describes the previous works on Meade and also lists some other publications or studies concerning the general's life. There is no mention of the numerous sources that were used to provide background knowledge of the events described in the narrative. However, these defects were probably partly the result of the book's pre-set format and only slightly detract from its overall effort.

As a whole, this book provides exactly what it intends, a concise yet accurate study of one of the central figures involved in our nation's most pivotal event. I certainly feel the author more than fulfilled the purpose he envisioned for this book, when he wrote "perhaps this new biography will spur fresh research about one of the Civil War's most famous and misunderstood generals. If so, I have succeeded in my intentions" (p. xi).

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