

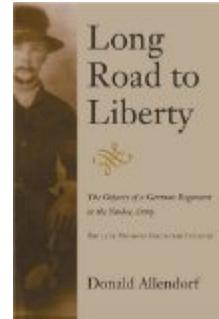
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Donald Allendorf. *Long Road to Liberty: The Odyssey of a German Regiment in the Yankee Army—the 15th Missouri Volunteer Infantry*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 2006. xxvii + 342 pp. \$39.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-871-9.

Reviewed by Terry Beckenbaugh (Department of Military History, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth)

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## Ably Filling a Niche

The best regimental histories not only dig deeply into the composition of the regiment in question, but also relate this information within the wider historiographical debates. They may not necessarily posit radical, new historiographical arguments, but they do add or chip away at the larger point. Donald Allendorf's *Long Road to Liberty: The Odyssey of a German Regiment in the Yankee Army—The 15th Missouri Volunteer Infantry* largely succeeds in doing just that. While Allendorf may overreach in some statements, that does not detract from his impressive research and fluid narrative style in rescuing an extremely active regiment's history.

The 15th Missouri was one of the three-hundred "fightingest" Federal regiments in the Civil War. Allendorf borrows the phrase from William Fox's study *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861-1865* (1889). Fox bestowed the sobriquet on a unit that suffered at least 10 percent of its losses in combat. Judging from the roll of significant battles the 15th Missouri participated in—Pea Ridge, Perryville, Stones River, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, Resaca, New Hope Church, Kennesaw Mountain, Peach Tree Creek, Spring Hill, Franklin, and Nashville—it is understandable that its casualty rate proved to be significantly higher. According to Allendorf, "more than half" of those who served with the 15th Missouri were killed or wounded in combat (p. xxi). That does not include those who died from disease. Surprisingly, for a unit to be involved in so many significant battles, few collections of letters from the unit survive

today. Yet Allendorf's diligent research uncovered a significant amount of material and allowed him to weigh in on several historiographical debates.

On the issue of a soldier's motivation to fight, Allendorf is adamant. He states: "Historians will probably argue forever the causes that led to the Civil War, but there is no mistaking why the German immigrant fought. The question of individual rights was the centerpiece. The German immigrant who made his home in Missouri was driven by it. He had collided with discrimination in America because he was not considered an American; he was a 'Dutchman.' His decision to volunteer at the very outbreak of the war made it plain that he would no longer bow to the discriminations he and his ancestors had endured for centuries in his mother country" (pp. xvii-xviii). Here Allendorf overreaches. Certainly, many of the German immigrants in Missouri fought for "individual rights," but to make such a blanket statement about German immigrants is too broad. What about German immigrants who were poor and enlisted for the bounty? What about those that enlisted due to peer pressure? What about German immigrants who volunteered to fight for the Confederacy? These are ignored. Granted, *Long Road to Liberty* focuses on the Germans in the 15th Missouri, but the language used does not make that distinction. It should.

Allendorf also is critical of General Henry W. Halleck's launching of the Pea Ridge campaign in late 1861.

He postulates, “But Halleck was not about to give away any part of his command and risk diminishing his importance. Initiating an attack here in Missouri would give him an excuse for not letting go any of his troops” (p. 38). Actually, the Pea Ridge campaign made perfect sense. As long as General Sterling Price and his Missouri State Guard (MSG) roamed the interior of Missouri they remained a threat to St. Louis—and made any advance down the Mississippi River problematic. While Allendorf’s point about Halleck not wanting to give up troops and maintaining his prestige may be accurate, the implication that the Pea Ridge campaign had little or no strategic significance seems short-sighted. While the Trans-

Mississippi was a backwater for most of the Civil War, at this point it was not precisely because the MSG remained in Missouri in strength. The Federal victory at Pea Ridge (March 7-8, 1862) and Rebel General Earl Van Dorn’s subsequent removal of the Army of the West to the east bank of the Mississippi River is what made the Trans-Mississippi of low strategic import.

Despite these shortcomings, *Long Road to Liberty* is a welcome addition to the field of the less-and-less neglected Western Theater historiography. Allendorf succeeded in rescuing one of the “fightingest” regiments from obscurity.

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