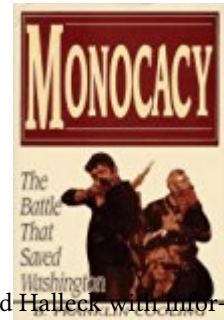


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

B. Franklin Cooling. *Monocacy: The Battle That Saved Washington*. Shippensburg: White Mane Publishing, 1997. xviii + 335 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57249-032-1.

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Just when we thought that the last shot had been fired in the frequent re-telling of the nation's epic tale, Frank Cooling has put his spotlight, and our attention, on a little-known episode that is pregnant with insights and drama. Little-known to most of us, that is, but not to Dr. Cooling, who has written extensively on the Washington defenses in three earlier books. "Overshadowed by better known battlefields like Antietam to the west and Gettysburg to the north," he writes, "Monocacy [taking its name from the river] may have been more important than either of them" (p. xi). This is a considerable statement to those who have dwelled on the significance of the other two titanic battles that concluded earlier Confederate invasions of northern territory in 1862 and 1863. Cooling's book is about a battle for three bridges over the Monocacy. It is also about a battle won but an opportunity for a strategic victory lost by the Confederate forces of Lieutenant General Jubal Early, who, according to the author's account, had been detached from General Robert E. Lee's forces at Petersburg to undertake the stroke against the Yankee capital in July 1864. It was the threshold of an election year in Washington and the presence of rebel troops provided a life-saving wake up call to a war-weary northern populace.

President Abraham Lincoln had brought "old brains," Major General Henry Halleck from the western theater, in 1862 to serve first as general-in-chief, then as the army's chief-of-staff in 1864, when Ulysses S. Grant was promoted.

From Washington City, Halleck tried to keep Grant's forces that were pressing Lee above Richmond informed and supplied. Halleck naturally became the coordinator of the Union defenses against Early's advance through Maryland toward the lines of the Monocacy and the Yan-

kee capital beyond. Grant had wired Halleck with information about Early's mission that he had learned from a deserter and urged him to "hold all of the forces" that he could muster and concentrate against the attack (p. 42). Halleck welded together a force almost as diverse as Coxe's Army of later times. To lead these forces, Halleck had reluctantly appointed the redoubtable but impetuous Major General Lew Wallace of Indiana, commander of the Middle Department. President Lincoln took the precaution of asking the governors of Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York to send additional volunteers for one hundred days of service in defense of the national capital. Halleck urged Grant to send him a "good major general" and some reinforcements for the impending battle (p. 41). Grant told Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, to send some dismounted cavalry, but they were to go light and were expected to return to City Point quickly—there still was no accurate sense of emergency and rumors in Washington abounded. Major General David Hunter's forces somewhere in West Virginia had been recalled, but they were not in contact with Halleck.

There are many interesting subplots and biographical vignettes distributed throughout Cooling's well-spun story. Particularly interesting is the 8th Illinois Cavalry and its commander Lieutenant Colonel David Clendenin. Sent by Wallace to find and delay the enemy, Clendenin's troops found Brigadier General Bradley Johnson's Confederate cavalry force west of the Catoctin Mountain on the road to Middletown on July 7. Fighting an effective delaying action as he fell back on Frederick, Maryland, Clendenin continued to report to Wallace, who was sending troops to the sound of the guns. The defense of Frederick was contested at the western outskirts of the city. Anyone who has driven from Frederick to Harpers Ferry on Route 15 south can appreciate the commanding ter-

rain even today. Fighting was light on July 8 and 9, but as Early's remaining divisions (Robert E. Rodes, John B. Gordon, Stephen D. Ramseur) began to close on Frederick, Wallace planned his retirement to defend the Monocacy crossings before being outflanked to the south and exposing Washington.

In two chapters, Cooling explains in detail the fighting for the Monocacy crossing points on July 9. Lurking in the background of this battle description is the mission that Lee had assigned to Early to release the two thousand Confederate prisoners of war being held at Point Lookout, where the Potomac River flows into Chesapeake Bay. Johnson, a native of Frederick, had been picked by Lee to effect the rescue, called off later in the campaign by Early. In an interesting vignette, we learn of the divided loyalties of Frederick's citizens, nearly evenly split between Union and Confederate sympathizers, and Early's attempts to extract a ransom of \$200,000 in currency and goods. The city fathers argued with Early's logisticians for a reduction in the levy, but they were rebuffed as Confederate fortunes in the fight south of town seemed to improve. They came up with the cash, fully 25 percent of their annual tax revenues, and avoided the torch. Meanwhile, Wallace divided his defensive sector along the Monocacy with Brigadier General Erastus Tyler north of the railroad bridge and Brigadier General James Ricketts's VI Corps infantry veterans south of that bridge. Old Jube's forces seemed to be drawn to the defended crossings like iron filings to a magnet, instead of forcing a crossing at one point, like Crum's Ford, or even slipping the entire army south toward Buckeystown and crossing the Monocacy in force behind Wallace. The detailed description of the fighting will not appeal to all readers, but Cooling is careful to keep the tactical action firmly situated in the operational setting.

Wallace, buoyed by the apparent successful defense on the morning of July 9, saw his fortunes shift quickly that afternoon as superior Confederate forces found fords and pressed across the Monocacy below the railroad bridge, turned the Union left flank, and then crossed the stone bridge to the north. Wallace's forces fell back to the north and then to the east of the stone bridge along the road to Baltimore with the intention of defending that place. The remainder of the story deals with the waning of the energy of the Confederate attack as it approached the Washington defenses (Ft. Stevens on July 12, for example), the withdrawal west toward Leesburg, and the feeble pursuit by elements of the Federal VI and XIX Corps. On August 6 at Monocacy Junction, Grant replaced Hunter with Major General Philip Sheridan.

What does this study offer that is new or that contributes to a better understanding of joint operations (yes, there was some naval participation) late in the war? There is a wealth of detail that Cooling has gleaned from official records and memoirs that adds a sense of drama to this story of operations near the Federal capital. Dr. Cooling offers some sober conclusions in his study. He skillfully explains the logistical tangle created by efforts to move troops and supplies by means of the same rolling stock and over the same railroad lines. Indeed, one of the strong points of this study is its insight into the role of civilian railroad leaders like John Garrett of the B&O. On reflection, one might question why the Early "raid" should have such a thorough examination. Frank Vandiver asked the same question as he was writing *Jubal's Raid* in 1960. Superior Union theater mobility allowed Grant and Halleck to shift forces in time to counter the move without diminishing the investment of Lee's forces at Petersburg. Also, there is some disagreement about whose idea the "raid on Washington" really was. Some have argued that Lee's intent was to send Early into the Shenandoah Valley to Lynchburg to chase Hunter back down the valley, but it was Early's interpretation of his mission later that led to the raid on Washington. Lee obviously would have been delighted to have significant Union forces siphoned off away from Petersburg and to have the Yankee capital in an uproar, but there is doubt as to how carefully formed and communicated his ideas were. But the non-tactical information alone is justification for this excellent book. It emphasizes again the nature of modern warfare as considerably more than fighting.

With two hundred pages of well documented narrative devoted to describing and assessing operations along the Monocacy, Cooling ends the study in an unconventional way with two retrospective chapters ("Legacy" and "Preservation and Monuments") and three appendices (order of battle information, Ohio "100 days" troops, and a self-guided tour). End notes and a very good bibliography complete this highly useful book that has reference value far beyond its monographic contributions. Generally, the maps are clear and usually positioned to reinforce the narrative without a lot of flipping back and forth. The photographs help readers to visualize the terrain, buildings, and people as they were in 1864. Civil War scholars, reenactors, and hobbyists will welcome this new book. We might expect to see an account of this third invasion of the North on the History Channel sometime, perhaps with this book's author as the "talking head." All in all, it is an entertaining and informative

read.

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