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John C. Jr.. Bonnell. *Sabres in the Shenandoah: The 21st New York Cavalry: 1863-1866.* Shippensburg, Penn.: White Mane Publishing, 1996. xiii + 377 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57249-012-3.

Reviewed by T. L. Beckenbaugh (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville)
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History never fails to note the spectacular. Be it a brilliant success or crushing defeat, historians are always eager to analyze the hows and whys of the special events. They scrutinize the dramatic to determine what made it unique. In the process, the normal, mundane, and not so spectacular often finds itself exiled by historians to the backwater of historical study. Recent trends, however, have attempted to rescue the minor actions and daily lives of Civil War combatants and civilians from oblivion, and John C. Bonnell's *Sabres in the Shenandoah: The 21st New York Cavalry, 1863-1866* falls into this category.

Bonnell's work catalogues the daily activities of the 21st New York's service in the Shenandoah Valley during the final two years of the Civil War and its service in the Colorado Territory before the regiment was mustered out in 1866. It reads almost like an itinerary, and at times Bonnell's exhaustive detail makes for tedious reading. Yet his research is thorough. Bonnell has examined all the major works on the campaigns in the Shenandoah Valley and pertinent primary sources. His four appendices, "The Troy Citizens Corps," "Cavalry Command at the Battle of Piedmont, 5 June 1864," "Gazetteer," and "Regimental and Company Rosters" are impressive and show that *Sabres in the Shenandoah* was a labor of love for Bonnell. The reader is afforded an in-depth picture of the Union cavalryman in the Valley. The daily regimen of a 21st New York trooper was dominated by boredom and interrupted by short stretches of sheer terror. Looming always in the background was the uneasiness associated with operating in hostile territory. Many 21st New York troopers relaxed their vigilance only to be killed or captured by one of the guerrilla bands that operated in the Shenandoah. In short, laxity was a luxury the Union cavalry could not afford.

Yet for all the detail given, Bonnell misses a golden opportunity to allow the troopers of the 21st New York to tell their own story. For example, when speaking of some green troopers, Bonnell states, "The details that were sent out on picket that night for the first time in enemy country would never forget their experiences and the images brought forth by their imaginations" (p. 18). But what were some of those images? The end notes identifies Chauncey S. Norton's _The Red Neck Ties, or History of the Fifteenth New York Volunteer Cavalry (Ithaca, NY, 1891) as the source for this episode, and the reader cannot help but wonder if Norton does not say more about it. Similar instances throughout the work leave the reader wanting to hear directly from these cavalrymen, to learn not only what they have to say, but what they saw, smelled, and thought.

In other instances, Bonnell interrupts the narrative with information that would be more useful in an end note. Throughout the work, whenever the 21st New York engages in a skirmish or is ambushed, Bonnell lists what happened to the troopers who were wounded or went missing. While such information suggests an impressive amount of research, it would be more welcomed if provided in a way that did not break the flow of the text.

More confusing is Bonnell's interchangeable use of the words *partisans*, *rangers*, and *guerrillas*. The Union army made clear distinctions between guerrillas and partisans. Indeed, to be a captured, non-uniformed combatant charged with being a guerrilla, rather than a uniformed partisan serving under John S. Mosby, could literally mean the difference between life and death. Only once does Bonnell mention Union partisans in the Valley. Having done so, he raises the question of how big their role may have been, but then he fails to address the issue.

Bonnell is similarly vague about some battles. His treatment of the battle of New Market needs to be fleshed out. While the 21st New York's role in the fighting is clearly explained, what happened in the battle and the results are not satisfactorily detailed. The reader is left in the dark as to what happened. Bonnell states that Union general Franz Sigel's defeat at New Market "was consid-

ered by most as a hard-fought loss due to his bad generalship and mismanagement" (p. 63). But whose opinion is this? Bonnell's? The end note does not explain his judgment either, so that the reader is left with still more questions. The battle of Lynchburg receives similarly vague treatment, and poorly drawn maps do not help matters.

One picture that Bonnell describes repeatedly is the harsh reality of the war for inhabitants of the Valley. They suffered keenly at the hands of the Union army of occupation. However, some of Bonnell's assertions about their mistreatment are not documented. For instance, he states, "Not only did the Federal government destroy the commerce of the valley, it also attempted to depopulate the valley" (p. 146). Ample evidence is given to show the destruction caused by the Union army, but there is little to support the assertion of a systematic plan by the Federals to depopulate the area.

Bonnell misses several opportunities to build on the the tremendous amount of research he has done by providing insightful analysis. Most of his analysis is only implied, so that readers are left to draw their own conclusions. For example, Bonnell characterizes Native Americans in the Colorado Territory as "marauders" who "constantly" terrorized settlers, miners and cavalry troopers (p. 186). But did conflict between whites and Indians occur that frequently?

Bonnell's *Sabres in the Shenandoah* paints a vivid portrait of a cavalry unit in the Shenandoah Valley. It is a work that students of Union cavalry operations will enjoy, but it could have been much more.

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