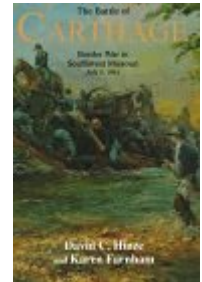


David C. Hinze, Karen Farnham. *The Battle of Carthage: Border War in Southwest Missouri, July 5, 1861.* Campbell, C.A.: Savas Publishing Co., 1997. vi + 314 pp. \$24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-882810-06-2.



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Published on H-CivWar (October, 1998)

Ask anybody about the first battle of the Civil War. Almost invariably, the answer will be "Bull Run" ("First Manassas", if you want). However, there was a smaller-scale battle more than two weeks earlier, and its impact, though hardly noticeable in Washington or Richmond, was certainly felt in the Trans- Mississippi theater of the war. David C. Hinze, teacher of history at a high school in Rolla, Missouri, and his former student Karen Farnham, have spent much time and effort to give a detailed account of one of the least researched battles of the Civil War. The fight at Carthage had all the odds for fame stacked against it: It took place in Southwestern Missouri, far from the capitals and centers, with no reporters or big newspapers at hand. It was fought between pre-confederate Missouri State Guardsmen on the one side and predominantly German Union volunteers on the other, and few of the men present rose to larger fame. And it was a draw.

Actually, as far as the last point is concerned, Hinze and Farnham argue that it wasn't: "While results can be manipulated and debated, one thing remains clear: Carthage was the first true field victory for Southerners and one of the few

successes in Missouri during four bloody years of military strife" (p. 217). In the face of all the arguments Hinze and Farnham present, one might still argue that 'Forty-eighter' Colonel Franz Sigel and his badly outnumbered command inflicted higher casualties than they suffered themselves and, after a day of hard fighting, managed an orderly withdrawal—a very difficult maneuver with largely untrained volunteer troops, and certainly something Gen. Irwin McDowell, for example, did not effect at Bull Run sixteen days later.

While the author's final conclusion thus remains debatable, the whole book is no doubt the most comprehensive piece of research written on the Battle of Carthage to date. As far as the battle itself is concerned, it is difficult to imagine a more detailed and thorough investigation. In light of the scattered, problematic, missing, and often contradictory evidence available, to research an early Western theater battle like this one is no minor undertaking, and Hinze and Farnham make a remarkable job of it. As usual local folklore, belittling or self-aggrandizing reports by the respective commanding officers, and sometimes outright falsifications have to be taken into account. To

make things worse, most of the reminiscences of the battle were written decades after the war, creating at best uncertain images, at worst complete distortions of what happened. Hinze and Farnham seem to steer a relatively safe course between the conflicting memoirs, carefully weighing them against each other.

One of their most interesting conclusions is that the running battle reportedly fought between Sigel's men and the Missouri State Guard between Buck Branch and Spring River, where Sigel's batteries supposedly leap-frogged along the retreating moving open square formed by infantry and wagons, simply did not take place. Even if Sigel's forces moved in the described manner, there is no evidence that anybody tried to get too close. "It was not simply or even primarily Sigel's superb training or discipline that won the race ... but the chronically inept handling of the Southern cavalry and the exhausted and disrupted state of the slowly pursuing Missouri State Guard infantry" (p. 175). This is one of the points the authors repeatedly make (have to make): whereas there was no lack of general officers among the State Guard, in decisive moments there was a lamentable lack of generalship. There is, for example, no evidence that Governor Claiborne F. Jackson led the troops nominally under his command--or who else did. Worse, the pincer movement around Sigel's flanks and into his back was not only ineffective--Lt. Col. Hassendeubel's battalion brushed off the guardsmen blocking their way at Buck Branch (p. 169-70)--but it further fragmented what little cohesion there had been on the Rebel side originally. However, in an army in which " ... rampant nepotism ... permeated its ranks" and "family ties took precedence over military training or competency [sic]" (p. 69), such things are probably unavoidable. Considering the odds, the rank and file of the Missouri State Guard seem to have marched and fought with astounding alacrity and perseverance.

The book is, on the whole, particularly strong on the Missouri State Guard and on the proto-Confederate political and military forces in Missouri and environs. The roles men like James Spencer Rains and Mosby Monroe Parsons played, as well as the characters of the men themselves, are aptly presented. Unfortunately, the same does not always apply to the Union side of the conflict, even though there are some strong moments here, too. One valuable insight is that into the obstructive role of "Chief Quartermaster Justus McKinstry, a quintessential bureaucrat," who never seems to have realized what a revolutionary situation he was in. Whereas they attempt to do justice to the background of the German "Forty-Eighters" among the Unionists in Missouri, Hinze and Farnham do not go as far as Steven Rowan, who has conclusively shown that what happened in St. Louis in the Spring of 1861 was in effect the "Second Baden revolution"--a violent overthrow of a counter-revolutionary State government on behalf of a grander national democratic idea. Only this time, the veterans of 1848 and 1849 were more successful. Unfortunately, this aspect is left out (as is Steven Rowan's name in the bibliographic citation of the important book *Germans for a Free Missouri*). Of the chapter entitled "The Germans" (pp. 10-36), only four pages are really devoted to the German population in St. Louis, and the Union volunteers of 1861. What the authors have to say about Franz Sigel's background on pp. 91-92 is simply a garbled mess-- and Hinze/Farnham cannot blame their sources here: Stephen Engle's *Yankee Dutchman: The Life of Franz Sigel* is usually accurate as far as the research is concerned. Most of the avoidable as well as the unavoidable inaccuracies in *The Battle of Carthage* sneak into the text where the German soldiers are concerned. Unavoidable are mistakes the authors inherit from older books like Ella Lonn's *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (1951) or A. E. Zucker's *The Forty-eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution* (1950), both of which have 48er veteran Captain Adolf Dengler killed at

Vicksburg. His Co. G was one of the units that confronted the Missouri State Guard attempt to cross Dry Fork Creek, he was cited by Sigel in his official report, and lived to command the 43rd Illinois to the end of the war.

Other mistakes are clearly due to deficient editorship. Soldiers described as in rags on page 64 turn into well-dressed men again by page 122, wearing "gray jackets (some trimmed with yellow piping), gray jeans pants and black shoes." The sources for this description are not given. Actually, the 3rd Missouri regiment wore a grey blouse with red collar (or neckerchief), probably modeled after the garments worn by the revolutionists in Germany in 1848 and 1849, notably by Georg Herwegh's "Legion" of German exiles returning to fight for democracy. Sigel's men were making a political statement by the cut of their uniforms. As far as the rest of the uniform is concerned, Andy Thomas's paintings, one of which is used for the book cover, are better researched than Hinze/Farnham's text. Likewise, a number of technical inaccuracies mar the text. Only the rifle companies of Sigel's infantry did indeed have rifles. The rest of the soldiers were equipped with smoothbores, Springfield 1842 model, and possibly even 1816 conversions, so the repeated assertion that the Federal fire was superior to that of the Missouri State Guard because they had rifles (pp. 122, 151) is not grounded on fact. Likewise, the authors forget somewhere along the road that Franz Backhoff's cannons, like those of the Missouri State Guard, were old 6-pounders--why Hiram Bledsoe, with one odd Mexican 9-pounder among his assorted hardware (p. 81), is all of a sudden commanding "lighter pieces" (p. 158) remains a mystery. The spirit of adventure seems to have gotten the better of the diligent research, especially regarding the latter stages of the battle, where numbers and company designations of the participating Germans vary, and maintained order while marching by company through the streets of Carthage (p. 183-84) turns into "Federals ... scrambling about in an [sic] mad attempt to es-

cape" (p. 189). And while *The Battle of Carthage* does contain comparatively less of the jingoistic "Germish" encountered in other campaign histories, already the idea that German volunteers would have "serenaded ... young ladies with 'John Brown's Body' and 'The Star-Spangled Banner' ... delivered in a mixture of broken English and German" (p. 103) is simply ridiculous. These problems, plus the usual misspellings of German names and institutions, could and should have been avoided. But then the focus of the authors' attention is clearly on the pro-Southern side of the conflict, and as stated above, it is difficult to imagine a more thoroughly investigated account of the battle of Carthage itself. If the book is, as David Hinze states in an (otherwise superfluous) interview at the end, "a labor of love under construction" (p. 314), then in a second edition they should eliminate these and other mistakes, and revise the incomplete bibliography.

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Citation: Wolfgang Hochbruck. Review of Hinze, David C.; Farnham, Karen. *The Battle of Carthage: Border War in Southwest Missouri, July 5, 1861*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. October, 1998.

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