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Phillip Thomas Tucker. *Westerners in Gray: The Men and Missions of the Elite Fifth Missouri Infantry Regiment.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2007. x + 331 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-3112-0.

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Remembering the Confederacy's Forgotten Warriors: The Fifth Missouri Infantry Regiment

Americans with even a casual interest in the history of the Civil War are at least vaguely familiar with the legendary Stonewall Brigade. But how many people know anything about the Fifth Missouri Infantry Regiment?- Jefferson Davis referred to the First Missouri Brigade, of which the Fifth Missouri was a part, as the "unsurpassed brigade" (p. 97). Edwin Bearss, the well-known National Park Service historian, claimed that "Cockrell's Missouri Brigade makes the Stonewall Brigade look like the Little Sisters of the Poor," and Phillip Thomas Tucker, author of *Westerners in Gray* describes the Fifth Missouri as "the best infantry regiment of the finest combat brigade on either side of the Civil War" (pp. 3, ix). Yet despite these high compliments, it seems that very few people are familiar with the battlefield exploits of this accomplished regiment. Given the anonymity of the Fifth Missouri in the pantheon of famed Civil War units, the purpose of Tucker's book is to shed light on the valor and deeds of the men of the Fifth Missouri. In doing so, Tucker examines the combat history of the unit, as well as camp life and the backgrounds of the men who made up the regiment.

Tracing the combat history of the Fifth Missouri, Tucker chronicles the regiment's actions from its inception in the summer of 1862 to its virtual demise during the Vicksburg Campaign a year later. Though the regiment's existence as an effective, intact unit was short-lived, the men of the Fifth Missouri amassed a stellar battlefield record that was earned through fighting in some of the toughest battles of the western theater of the Civil War. According to Tucker, one of the reasons that the Fifth Missouri excelled in battle was because several of the men of the regiment had gained experience during pitched battles against Kansas Jayhawkers in the 1850s. Tucker also argues that the diversity in the backgrounds of the men of the regiment added to their toughness and morale. The fact that the Fifth Missouri was composed of St. Louis "Irishmen and pro-South Missourians of mostly Upper South ancestry" made them "a unit possessing a unique blend of an unshakable esprit de corps, resiliency, high performance level, and iron discipline" (p. ix).

Beginning with the Battle of Iuka, Kentucky, the Fifth Missouri quickly earned the reputation of an elite Confederate unit. Later, during the Battle of Corinth, the men of the Fifth Missouri overran enemy positions at Battery Powell and Fort Richardson, capturing over forty pieces of field artillery. During Ulysses S. Grant's Mississippi campaign, the unit continuously faced overwhelming odds and difficult circumstances, performing impressively despite being poorly equipped and supplied at times. Perhaps one of the best examples of the Fifth Missouri's tenacity in battle occurred during the Battle of Port Gibson. As the situation at Port Gibson turned against the Confederates and a retreat became necessary, the men of Company I of the Fifth Missouri engaged in a rear-guard action, and one point in the battle, seven members of the unit held off an entire Union division while the rest of the regiment retreated. Another amazing battlefield feat of the Fifth Missouri took place at the Battle of Champion's Hill, where the Fifth Missouri earned its reputation as one of the best units on either side of the Civil War. There the regiment charged headlong into Grant's advancing army, almost splitting the Union center in two and nearly winning the battle for the Confederacy. Time and time again, from the Battle of Iuka to the Siege of Vicksburg, the Fifth Missouri proved to be among the best fighting units of the entire Confederate army.

Though the majority of the pages of *Westerners in Gray* focuses on the combat history of the unit, Tucker's work is no ordinary regimental history. Making excellent use of extensive archival research, which includes such sources as regimental histories, county histories, diaries, letters, service records, and memoirs, Tucker suc-

cessfully pieces together the backgrounds and prewar lives of many of the men who made up the Fifth Missouri. In doing so, he gives the reader a sense of the individual personalities of the officers as well as the enlisted men who came to make up the regiment. Tucker also explains the motivations behind the decisions of the soldiers of the Fifth Missouri to join the Confederate cause. Here he is on shaky ground, though, particularly in the way that he deals with the issue of slavery. In what reads as a feeble attempt to excuse the men of the Fifth Missouri from their role in the perpetuation of slavery, he makes the argument that though "the institution of slavery in Missouri was harsh and ruthless, it was not as horrible as slavery in the Deep South" (p. 45). While it may be true that life on the western frontier created a "greater closeness and interaction" between whites and their slaves, this fact does not necessarily mean that slavery was less harsh than in other areas of the South (p. 45). Despite this drawback, Tucker's discussion of other motivations, such as patriotism, desire for adventure, and the sense of duty to defend one's homeland, is astute.

Perhaps one other area in which *Westerners in Gray* deserves some criticism surrounds Tucker's claim that the Fifth Missouri was *the* best infantry regiment on either side of the Civil War. While it is true that the combat performance of the Fifth Missouri puts it in elite company, Tucker offers no proof to qualify his claim that the Fifth Missouri was *the* best. In fact, making such a claim is academically problematic. It brings up a whole host of other questions, the most obvious being how to substantiate this type of claim. Given this academic "can of worms," perhaps it would have been sufficient to say that the Fifth Missouri was *among* the best combat regiments of the Civil War, and not necessarily the best of all.

Extensively researched and well written, Tucker's *Westerners in Gray* does an excellent job of chronicling the history of one of the Civil War's most decorated but least know infantry regiments. By writing such an exemplary regimental history, Tucker succeeds in his attempt to save the Fifth Missouri from an undeserved fate of obscurity. Perhaps the book's only significant drawback is that Tucker does not follow the surviving members of the Fifth Missouri to the end the war. Following the death, capture, and parole of many of the members of the regiment during the Siege of Vicksburg, Tucker's narrative simply ends. He quickly summarizes what happened to the consolidated regiment during the rest of the war in a three-and-a-half page epilogue, but this leaves the reader wishing that he had devoted at least another chapter to this subject. After all, the surviving members of the Fifth Missouri fought in several more major engagements, including the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain and the Battle of Franklin. Despite this shortcoming, however, *Westerners in Gray* serves as an example of how regimental histories should be written.

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