



Robert Eno Hunt. *The Good Men Who Won the War: Army of the Cumberland Veterans and Emancipation Memory.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010. 178 pp. \$36.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1688-4.

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Exploring the Memories of Veterans from One of the Civil War's Neglected Armies

If asked to name one Union army, most students of the Civil War will likely name the Army of the Potomac, the long-suffering force that endured many commanders and several defeats before enjoying redemption at Gettysburg and ultimate victory at Appomattox. Few will mention the Army of the Cumberland, the Midwesterners who faced Confederate opponents on bloody fields on the other side of the Appalachians, at such places as Stones River, Chickamauga, and Chattanooga. The hard-fighting veterans led by William S. Rosecrans and George H. Thomas have seemingly failed to capture the public's imagination. As historian Larry J. Daniel points out in *Days of Glory*, his 2004 history of the Army of the Cumberland, it lacked "colorful units and flamboyant officers"; took long to solidify as an army; and was hampered by "command discord, feeble leadership, politics, and a War Department that often viewed it as a stepchild to the Army of the Potomac."^[1]

Fortunately, thanks to Daniel's extensive narrative history and two recent biographies of General Thomas (by Christopher Einolf and Benson Bobrick), the Army of the Cumberland may finally be getting much-needed attention. The latest contribution to the effort to understand the "Cumberlanders" is this excellent work by Robert Eno Hunt. Rather than attempt another comprehensive army history or battle study, Hunt has chosen to use regimental histories and personal memoirs (published in 1880 or later) to examine "how the authors included emancipation in their interpretation of the North's victory" (p. 1). Interestingly, Hunt goes far beyond that goal, however, investigating the mind-set of the Cumberland veteran in a number of important areas.

In his first chapter, Hunt examines the basic "pattern" of Army of the Cumberland regimental histories. Initially shocked and stunned by the attack on Fort Sumter, thousands of eager, patriotic, ordinary men rushed to the

colors, proving the superiority of the American citizen-soldier tradition. As they explained the political reasons for their enlistment, many soldier-writers compared the morally corrupt slave system of the South with the free-labor system that Midwesterners enjoyed. They went on to describe how they invaded the Confederacy and, when confronted by slavery on a personal level, became liberators. They won a decisive and undeniable victory on the battlefield, but the question of whether it was a "true and lasting victory" was far more problematic, given continued Southern resistance and the failure of Reconstruction (p. 35). In response, nearly all regimental history writers refused to discuss what that victory meant for the Southern political and social landscape.

The second chapter examines how the Cumberland volunteers were transformed from civilians to veterans as part of one of the greatest fighting forces of the nineteenth century. They overcame physical obstacles to become seasoned campaigners and subordinated themselves to army discipline, but deep down remained independent, self-reliant citizen-soldiers. Confronted by numerous temptations while away from the moral anchors of home and family, the Cumberlanders claimed that self-restraint and personal character allowed them to triumph. When discussing the issue of "hard war," authors pointed out that they fought within accepted limits. When mentioning General William Tecumseh Sherman's Savannah and Carolinas campaigns, however, the Cumberland writers diverged. Some who accompanied Sherman were convinced that the destruction they inflicted was necessary, while others felt more than a little uneasy about their conduct; those who stayed with James Schofield and Thomas in middle Tennessee during that period had no qualms in stating that their comrades with Sherman had "risked 'the fair name of this army'" by their actions against Southern civilians (p. 64). Mustered out and back in "God's Country," the veterans applied

their values of individualism, devotion to duty, and personal character to build an enterprising, vibrant, modern America.

Hunt also discusses how the Midwestern veterans incorporated African Americans and Confederate combatants and civilians—the “liberated and the vanquished”—into their collective memory (p. 74). The African Americans that the Cumberlanders encountered in their travels through the South assumed a variety of roles. Some simply lined country roads and cheered the Federals as liberators, while others came in close contact with soldiers as camp cooks or servants. A substantial number materially aided the cause as spies; guides, by assisting escaping Union prisoners; or as soldiers serving in the ranks. The Cumberland writers, of course, never doubted the supremacy of the white race, never regarded the conflict as a coalition war, and never considered themselves in a partnership with sympathetic Southern slaves or even United States Colored Troops.

As for their opponents, a few authors, such as Charles Manderson and Anson Mills, wrote “reunion pieces” that touted the manly virtues of both sides without discussing political issues (p. 75). Most Cumberland writers, however, were unabashedly willing to assail the Lost Cause to ensure that readers were aware that, although they respected the ordinary Southern fighting man, the cause for which the rebel soldier fought was unjust and indefensible, and the Union was right to win the war. In their encounters with hostile Southern women, the Federal veterans deflected the female anger and maintained their mutual honor. The invading Yanks were even successful in converting a few women to their cause.

Hunt concludes his work with “case studies” of two Cumberland authors. The first is Wilbur Hinman, a long-serving officer who penned the famous book *Corporal Si Klegg and His 'Pard'* (1887), a fictional story of a naïve country boy from Indiana who passed through the trial of combat, adjusted to soldier life, and became a veteran. Hinman’s tale is rather conservative in its treat-

ment of prewar politics and wartime emancipation. In contrast, Joseph Warren Keifer, an officer like Hinman, published his recollections of army life, including the relatively short time he served with the Army of the Cumberland. His emancipationist memoir contains a political narrative that devotes considerable space to a discussion of the causes of the war. What makes Keifer unique is that he also served in Congress and returned to the army as an officer in the Spanish-American War, and became a surprisingly enlightened expansionist who justified the U.S. “liberation” of Cuba in 1898 on humanitarian grounds.

In the end, the Union mobilized previously unimaginable military power that brought “hard war” to the South and crushed the Confederacy. The Army of the Cumberland’s veterans defined victory as destroying the Confederacy’s attempt to gain independence, attaining the noble goal of freeing African Americans in bondage, and maintaining the citizen-soldier tradition. It did not mean re-making Southern society, however. The meaning of their legacy was “the fact that the writers incorporated emancipation into the Cumberland army’s victory and the nation’s destiny secured by it. The issue was not Reconstruction but the kind of war that Cumberlanders—and the Union—had won. The critical fact was the military triumph itself and what had been won, or not won, by it” (p. 99).

The Good Men Who Won the War is a relatively short but important book. Hunt is to be commended for producing a very readable, well-researched, and thought-provoking study. His synthesis and interpretation of dozens of regimental histories and personal memoirs is an important contribution not only to the study of emancipation but also to the developing field of Civil War memory studies.

Note

[1]. Larry J. Daniel, *Days of Glory: The Army of the Cumberland, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), xiii.

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