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Clay Mountcastle. *Punitive War: Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals.* Modern War Studies Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009. x + 202 pp. cloth ($29.95), ISBN 978-0-7006-1668-8.

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Targeting Civilians: Federal Commanders Respond to Southern Guerrillas

The subject of guerrilla warfare in the Civil War has finally started to receive the academic attention that the topic has long deserved. In addition to many recent regional studies, the best overview on the topic is Daniel Sutherland's *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War* (2009). In *Punitive War*, Clay Mountcastle has a very focused thesis. He argues that the chief reason the Union army began targeting civilians and their property during the war was in response to guerrilla activity in occupied areas. According to Mountcastle, soldiers in the field and later their commanders escalated the brutality of the war by targeting the property of Southern civilians because these civilians allegedly harbored pro-Southern guerrillas. As the war progressed, Federal officers who had firsthand experience dealing with guerrillas in the West, including Generals Henry W. Halleck, Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, and Philip H. Sheridan, used these tactics to escalate the scope and brutality of the war in the East.

The work is divided into five chapters. The first deals with the U.S. Army's antebellum precedents in punitive warfare. During the Second Seminole War (1835-42), the army found that the best way to counter the Native Americans' use of hit-and-run tactics was to target and destroy their settlements. During the Mexican War, American leaders also turned to collective punishment to discourage civilians from harboring irregulars. However, their antebellum experience and training would fall far short in preparing them to face the depth of resistance the Confederacy would offer. In chapter 2, Mountcastle turns to the early war experiences of Union officers in Missouri where a guerrilla war had been going on since the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. In response to guerrilla raids, including William Clark Quantrill's attack on Lawrence, Kansas, Union officials began holding civilian communities responsible for harboring irregulars. General John M. Schofield issued General Order No. 11 ordering the Union army to burn out four counties along the Kansas/Missouri border and perhaps displacing as many as twenty thousand noncombatants.

Navigation along the Mississippi River also proved a challenge for Federal troops and authorities. In response to Southern sniping and shelling of Union river traffic, the Federals began a series of retaliatory raids that included the burning of many towns and settlements up and down the river. U.S. Army and naval forces destroyed entire towns, including Donaldsonville, Louisiana; Randolph, Tennessee; and Hopfield, Arkansas. In addition, countless farms and plantations of those who had allegedly harbored guerrillas along the river were destroyed. After the fall of Vicksburg, Sherman launched an offensive in February 1864 targeting the rail junction in Meridian, Mississippi. Along the route to and from their target, Sherman's troops frequently burned civilian towns and property in retaliation for harboring guerrillas. By the time of his famous March to the Sea, Sherman and his men had already perfected their form of punitive war. Mountcastle argues that "in essence, the guerrilla problem did not provide Sherman the exact reason to make war against civilians and their property, but it certainly provided the justification" (p. 101).

In describing the guerrilla war in Virginia, Mountcastle agrees with historian Anne Bailey's contention that "'in Virginia the armies generally waged war within the parameters acceptable to nineteenth-century Americans"' (p. 137). He then goes onto argue that exceptions to those rules were far more common than many historians have suggested. Beginning in 1862, the Union had difficulty controlling newly occupied areas including what became West Virginia. When it became clear that the conciliatory views of General George B. McClellan would not work, Virginians felt the hard hand of war as it had been fought in the West. When Union Colonel John T. Toland attempted to take the western

Virginia mining town of Wytheville, his forces came under fire from houses in town. After Toland fell in the fighting, Union forces took the town and burned it to the ground, claiming that they had been fired upon by civilians, including women. In the northern Shenandoah Valley, Federal authorities faced resistance from organized and enlisted partisan bands, including the men of Colonel John S. Mosby's command. Although not technically a guerrilla unit, Mosby's men did fight in a nonconventional style and U.S. authorities made no distinction between the types of irregular organizations they fought. Union commanders became increasingly exasperated in attempting to control "Mosby's Confederacy" and began resorting to collective punishment of the civilian population and executing prisoners.

Virginians in the Shenandoah Valley felt the full force of the punitive war with the arrival of Grant in 1864. Grant sent a series of expeditions into the area that ended with the destruction of much civilian property. General David Hunter's forces destroyed the campus of the Virginia Military Institute and much of Lexington, Virginia. After Hunter was defeated and driven from the valley, Sheridan launched a punitive campaign that would lay waste to much of the area. Using the example of the burning of the town of Dayton, Virginia, Mountcastle argues that Sheridan's motives for the destruction of civilian property were due to his frustration with the civilian population who he believed sheltered guerrillas who sniped at his command. Although Grant had ordered him to destroy supplies and property that could support the Confederate army, in Dayton, the town "provided little, if any, substance for the rebel army. Sheridan's intent was purely retaliatory in nature; one might say vengeful" (p. 130). Later under orders from Sheridan, General Wesley Merritt would burn his way through the heart of "Mosby's Confederacy," destroying much of Loudoun and Fauquier counties in clear retaliation for supporting guerrillas.

Mountcastle's objective in this study is to discover the motivations behind the Union command's decision to target civilians and their property to the extent of destroying homes, crops, livestock, and even entire communities. He directly challenges historian Mark Neely's highly controversial assertion in *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction* (2007) that the war was not nearly as brutal on the home front as many have contended. In much of the work, Mountcastle challenges the conclusions of Neely and, to a lesser extent, those of Mark Grimsley's *The Hard Hand of War* (1997) and others. The work does not attempt to enter the argument over whether or not the Civil War was a harbinger of "total war" and acknowledges the bloody world history of deliberately targeting civilians. As a rule, Union commanders did not attempt to physically punish, intern, or kill civilians. But they did target the private property of white and black Southerners. Just because they did not kill civilians, Mountcastle asks, "Does that mean, however, that that they were merciful? Does it mean that they were justified? Does it mean that the burning of homes, the slaughtering or confiscation of livestock and the depopulation of entire counties were retaliations proportional to the offense?" (p. 144). Private property was often destroyed out of military necessity so grain and other supplies would not be used to support Confederate forces, but more often than not, argues Mountcastle, it was in retaliation for supporting guerrillas. Mountcastle concludes that "perhaps the Union response to the guerrilla problem does not belong among the most brutal examples of military force in history, but when placed in context of American military experience in the nineteenth century, it was absolutely unparalleled in its destructiveness" (p. 145).

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