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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Benton Rain Patterson. *The Mississippi River Campaign, 1861-1863: The Struggle for Control of the Western Waters.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2010. 282 pp. $38.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-5900-1.

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Published on H-CivWar (February, 2011)
Commissioned by Martin Johnson

"The Mississippi Is Opened"

In the abundant amount of Civil War scholarship devoted to the war's military engagements, the battles and campaigns of the eastern theater have dominated the discussion of strategies, tactics, and leadership. While General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia initiated an offensive into Pennsylvania, culminating in the three-day battle at Gettysburg, General Ulysses S. Grant's campaign to open the Mississippi River proved to be the strategically decisive battle of July 1863. Firmly entrenched in popular memory, Gettysburg stands as the "high water mark" of the war, while Federal accomplishments in the western theater, though more critical to Union victory, have been overshadowed in the Civil War scholarship. Recent trends within Civil War scholarship are redirecting the debate of a decisive theater away from Virginia and toward operations in the western theater.

Benton Rain Patterson, an emeritus professor of journalism at the University of Florida, offers a discussion of the North's drive to capture and control the strategically vital Mississippi River. In *The Mississippi River Campaign*, Patterson narrates operations along the western waters, culminating in the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863. Patterson's twenty-six chapters highlight the critical steps and engagements toward the North's possession of the Mississippi River. His work begins with General John Fremont's operations in Missouri in 1861, Fremont's emancipation proclamation to Missouri slaves, and President Abraham Lincoln's subsequent removal of Fremont. The Confederacy's first operations focused on Kentucky, a state that initially declared its neutrality in the war. When Major General Leonidas Polk's Confederate forces moved on Columbus to strengthen their defense of the Mississippi River, Kentucky's neutrality came to an end. Though Union forces under the command of Grant proceeded to occupy Paducah, at the mouth of the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, Patterson concludes that "Kentucky's critical neutrality, thanks to Leonidas Polk, had come to an end" (p. 16). From this point on events in the western theater deteriorated for the Confederate military and nation. Thereafter, the South lost possession of Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Island No. 10; engaged in a horrifically bloody battle at Shiloh; experienced defeat at Memphis; and saw possessions in Louisiana, including Fort Jackson, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and eventually Port Hudson fall into Union hands.

Within this narrative, Patterson addresses issues of dispute within the Union high command, including tensions between Lincoln, Henry Halleck, general in chief of the Union army, and Grant. In addition to narrating the familiar efforts of the high command, Patterson explores the contributions of individuals whose names are not immediately associated with the war or recognized. For example, Charles Ellet, Jr., a civil engineer, deserves credit for pioneering the idea of converting riverboats into fighting rams by fitting them with iron prows. The Confederate navy readily demonstrated the threat of this style of warship by the successful engagement of the CSS *Virginia* (formally the USS *Merrimack*) in Hampton Roads, Virginia, in 1862. Through Ellet's efforts, the North developed a fleet of rammers to operate along the Mississippi River, but unfortunately Ellet fell mortally wounded in the battle of Memphis (June 6, 1862) and did not live to see the triumph of the Federal navy.

The Confederate navy had few reasons to boast. First and most critically, at war's outbreak the South lacked a navy. The Confederate secretary of navy, Stephen Russell Mallory, struggled to convert steamers into warships, eventually creating the River Defense Fleet. In addition to the CSS *Virginia*, the CSS *Arkansas* reported laudable performance. Totaling over 165 feet in length, the CSS *Arkansas*, equipped with ten guns and powered by two low-pressured steam engines below the hull, could travel at eight miles per hour. In July 1862, Confederates ran

the *Arkansas* through the Federal fleet near Vicksburg, but in order to keep the ship from falling into the hands of the North shipmates scuttled the ship.

Typical of many military history narratives, Patterson's work lacks a unifying thesis. Within his chapters, Patterson explains the strategic importance of particular places, such as Forts Henry and Donelson; Paducah, Kentucky; and Port Hudson, Louisiana. Upon securing Port Hudson, on July 9, 1863, General Nathaniel Banks succinctly telegrammed General Grant, "the Mississippi is opened" (p. 255). Patterson's narrative abruptly ends with the Union occupation of Port Hudson. Though this event marked the triumph of Federal efforts to secure the entirety of the Mississippi River, Patterson fails to offer an analysis of the larger strategic implications of this two-year campaign. In short, Patterson's work leans heavily toward simple narrative, without analysis. Furthermore, his research has limitations. He relies heavily on secondary sources, namely, Shelby Foote's work, and draws much of his primary source base from General Grant's memoirs. Patterson neglects to make extensive utilization of the *Official Records* (1881-1901) or exhaustive research into primary accounts from Union and Confederate soldiers who participated in these campaigns. Patterson also quotes heavily, if not excessively, from the sources providing numerous full-text, block quotes consistently within his chapters. This style of writing, in addition to the twenty-six short chapters, provides for a choppy narrative.

The Mississippi River Campaign narrates a critical aspect of the Civil War. Recent scholarship suggests that future historians will continue to address the strategic significance of the war's western theaters.

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Citation: Jennifer Murray. Review of Patterson, Benton Rain, *The Mississippi River Campaign, 1861-1863: The Struggle for Control of the Western Waters.* H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. February, 2011.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31905

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