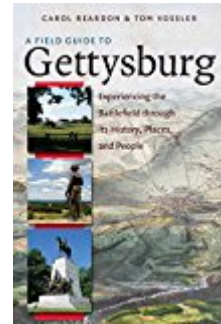


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Carol Reardon, Tom Vossler. *A Field Guide to Gettysburg: Experiencing the Battlefield through Its History, Places, and People*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. Illustrations, maps. 464 pp. \$22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-3525-8.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

According to recent estimates, there are over sixty-five thousand books written about Gettysburg, with subjects ranging from the memory of Pickett's Charge to the menu at General Pickett's Buffet. None of these books accomplish what Carol Reardon and Tom Vossler have achieved with *A Field Guide to Gettysburg: Experiencing the Battlefield through Its Historical Places and People*. As its title indicates, the book allows the reader to reconstruct, interpret, and essentially understand the Battle of Gettysburg through the eyes of those who fought. Although *A Field Guide to Gettysburg* generally follows the Park Service auto tour, there are several additional opportunities that make this anything but a standard excursion.

The book is divided into three main sections, one for each day of the battle, and each section is subdivided into chapters that follow that day's events. Each chapter is broken into subsections that correspond with one of thirty-five tour stops. Tour stops begin with an orientation that allows the reader to pinpoint the location on one of the corresponding forty-seven maps and to begin to understand the significance of the battlefield itself as a primary source.

Next, the authors ask "What Happened Here?" and

provide a few paragraphs of powerful prose describing events that took place at that location. The authors often use the words of soldiers, from officers to enlisted men, to develop the narrative and accordingly, put the reader into the action. The clearly drawn maps depict troop movements, some down to the company level, facilitating an understanding of the battle from the soldier's point of view. To further explore the action from this perspective, Reardon and Vossler then ask "Who Fought Here?" and "Who Commanded Here?" These areas of investigation describe the troops engaged as well as the personalities involved. All of this makes the following heading "Who Fell Here?" that much more powerful. The use of individual vignettes helps illustrate that each number in a casualty report was an individual, a real human being, not merely a statistic or a name in a history book tucked away on some dusty bookshelf. Indeed, the authors often examine the impact of death upon a soldier's family, thus personalizing the battlefield. For several tour stops, the authors include the heading "Who Lived Here?" that considers the civilians of Gettysburg whose lives were disrupted and in some cases destroyed by the carnage of battle and its lingering aftermath. The study of each tour stop concludes with the heading "What Did They Say about It Later?" offering the reader a consideration

of how Gettysburg began its evolution in historical memory.

It is not uncommon to see visitors to Gettysburg traipsing across the battlefield with the Official Records in one hand, a map in the other, and a backpack loaded with the complete works of Harry Pfanz. To a great extent, *A Field Guide to Gettysburg* eliminates the need to

carry that weight. Reardon and Vossler have provided an instant classic in a single volume that is both eminently readable and exceptionally useable, ideal for those participating in staff rides, educational tours, or a self-guided exploration of the battlefield. Even if one lives nowhere near the battlefield, *A Field Guide to Gettysburg* is a perfect companion book to supplement traditional Gettysburg monographs.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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