

Bruce Tap. *The Fort Pillow Massacre: North, South, and the Status of African Americans in the Civil War Era.* London and New York: Routledge, 2014. 216 pp. \$130.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-415-80863-7.



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Commissioned by Christopher Childers (Pittsburg State University)

Most American Civil War specialists now hold that General Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederate force that attacked Fort Pillow, Tennessee, on April 12, 1864, ended up massacring many of the black and white unionist soldiers there. Illustrating that view and just in time for the incident's sesquicentennial, Bruce Tap's *The Fort Pillow Massacre: North, South, and the Status of African Americans in the Civil War Era* (2014), was published within Routledge Press's Critical Moments in American History series. These short books, primarily intended for classroom use, contain primary sources and extensive introductions.

As such, *The Fort Pillow Massacre* has a number of educational elements. A map helps readers understand the main battle site, but markings incorrectly locate the starting point of the attack and the outer earthworks, both of which lay beyond the area shown. The book usefully includes a timeline, bibliography, and annotations for the documents. Its prints and political cartoons would serve a class discussion well. Numerous short,

boxed features are interesting, but many are rather tangential.

The book series aims to present "engaging primary sources" (p. vii) and does so. The documents include the best contemporary Confederate description of the massacre, some of Forrest's correspondence, samples of Federal survivor testimony, and representative editorials. Yet, most items come from the Federal side, especially the investigations by the army and Congress. Good additions would be contemporary letters by Charlie Robinson, "Marion," and "Memphis"; an April 28, 1864, *Richmond Examiner* editorial; Forrest's two reports; and more of his correspondence with superiors. The work sometimes neglects to note the date of a document.

Most of the book consists of Tap's logically organized chapters. He had previously written about the congressional investigation in his *Over Lincoln's Shoulder: The Committee on the Conduct of the War* (1998). The new book has a background chapter and a later segment on the post-

war period which effectively establish a very broad context for the era's race relations. The author also contributes an overview of the incident and its aftermath. A chapter on Fort Pillow's historiography mostly provides excellent coverage. But, it attributes allegations about rapes by black Federals to Thomas Jordan and J.P. Pryor's *The Campaigns of Lt. Gen. N.B. Forrest* (1868), when they originated much later in James Dinkins, *Personal Recollections and Experiences in the Confederate Army* (1897).

Tap synthesizes recent historical studies about the massacre. He finds racial prejudice common, though not universal, in the nineteenth-century United States. By the fall of 1862 the Republican Party's wartime policies threatened slavery and white supremacy. The beginning in 1863 of extensive Federal enlistment of black troops "implied parity between former slaves and Confederate soldiers that many Confederates could not stomach" (p. 117). This insult to their honor enraged Confederates and provoked a spontaneous slaughter at Fort Pillow. He concludes that "A preponderance of evidence makes it obvious that a brutal massacre took place at Fort Pillow on April 12, 1864. None of the reasons put forth by points of view sympathetic to the Confederacy provides a plausible alternative explanation" (p. 117). He particularly rejects Confederate claims that Federals were drunk, that no Federals tried to surrender, and that Federals tried to lure Confederates within their gunboat's range. He does accept the Confederates' claim that the unionist Federals infuriatingly included a number of Confederate deserters, something that, while plausible, has never been proven from service records. After carefully reviewing the inconclusive evidence about Forrest's role, the author thoughtfully contends that the general likely knew a massacre might occur but "did not move immediately to stop it" (p. 59). Both the impracticalities of revenge and continuing Northern prejudice prevented retaliation. He observes that "it is difficult to maintain that racial relations were revolution-

ized as a result of the Civil War" (p. 124). There is a tension between the forcefulness of Tap's interpretations and the series' aim to have students "reach their own conclusions" (p. vii). His findings might best be presented as one typical current view.

Tap's chapters are mostly well written in a flowing style. Key points reappear at different points in the text, something helpful for undergraduates. However, numerous typos, misspellings, and wrong words mar communication at times. Some statements have misleading wording. For example, the claim that "the Lincoln Administration warned Southerners in rebellion that it ... was inching toward a position of social and political equality between the two races" (p. 2) should have been qualified as the Confederates' perception. One supposed quotation on p. 41 actually consists partly of an inaccurate summary cited to the wrong page in the source.

The Fort Pillow incident is such a challenging subject to study that it is easy to make factual errors. Despite extensive research, Tap made some. Examples are the claims that Federal general Stephen Hurlbut never evacuated the fort (in early 1864 the fort he closed it for seventeen days), that the last garrison included the entire 6th United States Colored Heavy Artillery (actually just one battalion), and that Lincoln issued a retaliation order for Fort Pillow (Roy Basler's *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* [1953] clarifies that it did not get past a draft). Fortunately, most of the other mistakes involve minor matters.

To this reviewer, it looks like the press rushed the book to print before the incident's 150th anniversary. If flaws could be cleaned up in a second edition, a valuable product would result.

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