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Charles G. Beemer. *"My Greatest Quarrel with Fortune": Major General Lew Wallace in the West, 1861-1862.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2015. 342 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-60635-236-6.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

On April 6, 1862, the first day of the Battle of Shiloh, major generals Lew Wallace and Ulysses S. Grant both made mistakes. Grant received criticism for being surprised by a Confederate force under the command of Albert Sidney Johnston, and Wallace for taking too much time to reach the battlefield. The result was the deadliest battle in the United States up to that point, and there was plenty blame to go around. Wallace, possibly unjustifiably, received more and more of the blame as the years passed. If a Civil War scholar or enthusiast is looking for a defense of the Indianan's actions at Shiloh, and especially a pro-Wallace version of the fight for honor and reputation that followed the battle, then Charles G. Beemer's volume will be of great interest. On the other hand, this monograph does not focus heavily on political generalship, Lew Wallace's value to the Union cause, or the possible reasons for his temperamental nature.

The author's main concern is the efforts to criticize Wallace, mainly by members of Grant's staff and Henry Halleck, after the Battle of Shiloh. Beemer makes a fair case that several people worked or wrote to keep Wallace out of a command well into 1864. It appears that John Rawlins and other Grant staffers submitted reports and letters on Shiloh that commented negatively on Wallace's performance. This is not an earth-shattering revelation. Beemer, however, believes that this all amounts to a conspiracy to defame the Indianan, as well as a cover-up, and he proceeds to poke holes in their writings. Sometimes he points at inconsistencies, and sometimes at what he seems to think are overly consistent messages in the letters of Grant and mostly his staff officers. This method seems a bit forced. However, if Beemer is merely trying to say that friends of Grant tried extra hard to tell their (and Grant's) side of the story (believing what was convenient in the process), then this reviewer agrees. If, on the other hand, the author is seeking to reveal a concerted attempt to lie about Lew Wallace, then this reviewer is not convinced.

Beemer does not provide any concrete evidence to prove that Wallace was not at some fault for the tardiness and miscommunications of April 6. Of course, Grant must take some blame—maybe more than he did in the years to come—but this might not be the best argument for why Lew Wallace and Grant's men told different versions of the story; they failed to communicate effectively at the time, and thus never did understand each other, even years after the battle. For this reviewer, the word "conspiracy" is not helpful here; it implies an effort to lie or commit a crime—"a secret plan made by two or more people to do something that is harmful or illegal," according to the Merri-

am-Webster Dictionary. In fact, all parties were most likely trying to divert blame or attention from themselves to others who had messed up just as much.

The author makes his arguments with a lot of conviction, which often seems to suggest proof when there really is very little. One might argue that he is overly critical of others in an attempt to help Wallace's reputation (pp. 81-82, 90, 104). But, while criticizing and blaming West Pointers, with emphasis on their biases, he has no choice but to explain how Wallace was often disrespectful to them (pp. 4, 21-42, 51, 69). It is difficult to argue that someone has been unfairly treated when that person did much to bring that treatment upon himself. As Lorien Foote might suggest, Lew Wallace was both a nineteenth-century "rough" and a "gentleman"—dueling conceptions of manhood in that era.[1] West Pointers tended to fall in the latter category, and would not have been so willing to tolerate the Indianan's behavior, a fact that might go further toward explaining these disagreements than "conspiracies" and "biases."

In conclusion, this reviewer does find Beemer's book to be an interesting look into the fight for reputation. And, the author adequately shows that Wallace may have received more blame than deserved. On the other hand, such polemical studies on a given topic are difficult to evaluate. Discerning between good points and forced ones is a challenge. If not for the above, this monograph would be an excellent study of Wallace's and Grant's efforts to protect their reputations; if I am wrong about Beemer's methods, then I guess that is exactly what he has achieved. For example, the author's discussion of Wallace's time before the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War is particularly helpful in understanding Halleck's and Grant's frustrations with the political general, assuming they knew a lot about his testimony. In the end, the book does offer a forceful counter to books that may be too hard on Wallace. One might be inclined to call it a good or excellent counter, were it not so forceful. Nevertheless, the book will be of great value to those interested in Wallace, Grant, war and memory, and the West Pointers' disdain for more belligerent, or "rough," political generals like Lew Wallace.

Note

[1]. Lorien Foote, ***The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army*** (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 1-16.

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