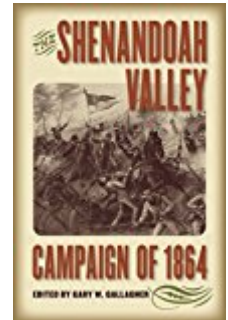


Gary Gallagher, ed. *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. ix + 416 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-3005-5.



Reviewed by Mark Bradley (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

Published on H-War (September, 2007)

The Valley Revisited

The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864 is the ninth volume in editor Gary W. Gallagher's Campaigns of the Civil War series for the University of North Carolina Press. Gallagher is a professor of history at the University of Virginia and one of the most respected scholars of the Civil War era. Among the contributors are series veterans Keith S. Bohannon, Robert K. Krick, Robert E. L. Krick, and William J. Miller. The newcomers include some familiar names--Joseph T. Glatthaar and Joan Waugh--and some less familiar--William W. Bergen, Andre M. Fleche, Aaron Sheehan-Dean, and William G. Thomas.

Gallagher's "Two Generals and a Valley" compares the campaign's two commanders, Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early and Union Major General Philip H. Sheridan. Gallagher notes that Early "fought from a position of relative weakness, coaxing the maximum from his small army" (p. 27), whereas Sheridan "survived tactical lapses at least as serious as his opponent's precisely because he could call on ample reserves of infantry and powerful cavalry" (p. 21). In the con-

clusion, Gallagher questions whether Sheridan could have matched Early's achievement had their roles been reversed. Such idle speculation adds little to our understanding of the campaign or the commanders. Far more illuminating is Miller's point on Tom's Brook. For much of the war, Miller argues, Federal generals had "been proving that advantages in numbers, weaponry, and supply did not translate into victory if leadership was wanting" (p. 155). For all his flaws, the pugnacious, charismatic Sheridan provided the leadership that had been so clearly lacking before.

The Glatthaar essay discusses Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's response to Early's raid, which he identifies as a crucial test for the Union Army's general in chief. Glatthaar notes that Grant, ever-focused on defeating Lee's army, "responded slowly to Early's threat" (p. 42), and he holds the Union's highest-ranking general responsible for the circumstances that enabled Early to elude his Federal pursuers for most of the summer. After making a futile search for a general to hunt down Early, Grant and President Abraham Lincoln at last hit

upon Sheridan as "a hard-driving commander who would fight relentlessly and seek the destruction not only of Early's troops but also of the resources of the Valley" (pp. 48-49). Glatthaar credits Grant with grasping "the political nature of the commanding general's position" (p. 52), which sometimes required him to ride herd over army officers and civilian bureaucrats who resisted his initiatives.

The title of Bohannon's contribution, "'The Fatal Halt' versus 'Bad Conduct,'" neatly summarizes the debate between Early and John B. Gordon over the cause of the Confederates' reversal of fortune at Cedar Creek. Bohannon examines the two generals' conflicting postwar accounts in light of contemporaneous reports, letters, and journal entries, and he concludes that each man must share the blame. Many of Gordon's troops did break ranks to plunder abandoned Federal camps and wagons, and Early's order to halt his victorious army deprived the Confederates of their "best chance of inflicting a decisive defeat against a larger enemy army" (p. 78).

Given the vast number of books and articles about the Civil War, it is astonishing that Bergen's biographical essay on Union Major General Horatio G. Wright constitutes the first such account. After all, how could a man who commanded the Sixth Corps of the Army of the Potomac for a full year fall into such obscurity? As Bergen's title ("The Other Hero of Cedar Creek") indicates, Wright's exploits seemed destined to be overshadowed by those of more flamboyant figures such as Sheridan. The modest and unassuming Wright led his command with a quiet competence that impressed his superiors, but failed to gain him wider recognition. Nor did Wright publicize his wartime service in postwar writings as so many other generals did. Wright at least enjoys the good fortune of having a first biographer as conscientious and sympathetic as Bergen.

Waugh's biography of Union cavalryman Col. Charles Russell Lowell of Massachusetts and

Robert K. Krick's group portrait of three Virginia Pattons who fought for the Confederacy serve as reminders of the incalculable loss such promising young men represent. Of the four, Lowell fell at Cedar Creek; Col. Waller T. Patton was mortally wounded in the July 3 assault at Gettysburg, popularly known as "Pickett's Charge"; and Col. George S. Patton (grandfather of the famed World War II general) succumbed to a shell fragment at Third Winchester. Only Col. John M. Patton Jr. survived the war. Their stories tell us much about mid-level (regimental and brigade) command in Civil War armies and the sort of men who filled those positions.

In "Never a More Complete Victory," Miller argues that the lopsided cavalry fight at Tom's Brook reveals the extent to which Union and Confederate cavalry in the war's Eastern Theater had reversed roles. In Miller's view, Federal cavalymen had achieved superiority not only in numbers, equipment, and supplies, but also in training and doctrine. He notes that during the final year of the war, Federal cavalymen had shown themselves equally adept at fighting while mounted or on foot, a remarkable accomplishment that European army reformers sought to emulate two decades later.

In "A Stampeed of Stampeeds," Robert E. L. Krick dissects the "the Confederate disaster at Fisher's Hill." He traces the cause of the defeat to the casualties sustained at Third Winchester and earlier battles, for they left Early with an army too depleted at all levels to duplicate its past successes. Krick notes that the defeat left most of the Valley exposed to "rapacious Federal cavalry" (p. 189). But he argues that the moral effect proved greater than the physical, for the seeds "of doubt and demoralization" sown at Fisher's Hill "sprouted an ugly fruit four weeks later in the even greater disaster at Cedar Creek" (p. 190).

Fleche's "Uncivilized War" examines the futile attempt of the Northern Democratic press to make political hay out of the destructiveness of Sherid-

an's Valley campaign. The fall of Atlanta, the Union naval victory at Mobile Bay, and Sheridan's successes in the Valley discredited the "war failure" plank of the Democratic platform and left the opposition press groping for an alternative issue. They seized upon the Valley campaign because it was timely and just about the only option left to them. But the issue failed to persuade Northern voters, largely because they saw no reason to discard a successful war policy, even if that policy appeared harsh. While Fleche has correctly identified the fall-back position of the Democratic press, he fails to convince that it made a viable alternative.

In "Nothing Ought to Astonish Us," Thomas presents the Valley campaign as viewed by the Confederate civilians who resided there. Early's defeat and the widespread destruction of private property left many Valley residents disoriented. "Confederate civilians found that they did not quite know themselves," Thomas observes, and "that their astonishment knew few boundaries" (p. 250). Some civilians were driven by their plight to consider the otherwise unthinkable. Thomas quotes a letter from a man who declares his preference for independence without slavery to capitulation with it, followed by a petition from several Rockingham County women volunteering to fight for the Confederacy. Although such patriotic sentiments proved fleeting, Valley residents' hatred of Federal soldiers remained deep and abiding.

Sheehan-Dean's "Success Is So Blended with Defeat" argues that the morale of Virginia soldiers in the Valley remained high even after the shattering defeats of the 1864 Valley Campaign. "Without the foresight to anticipate the defeat of Lee outside Petersburg the following spring," Sheehan-Dean argues, "few of the Virginians living and serving in the Valley knew enough to despair" (p. 285). Perhaps, but the evidence presented by Bohannon, Miller, Thomas, and especially Robert E.L. Krick suggests otherwise. Far more persuasive is Sheehan-Dean's assertion that Sheridan's destructive

campaign "fired the hatred of Confederates for Federals to a harder temper, producing a sullen sheen of bitterness and mistrust that lasted well into the postwar years" (p. 287).

In collections of this sort disagreements between contributors are bound to arise, but these impromptu debates make reading such books all the more enjoyable and informative. Those already familiar with the Campaigns of the Civil War series will want to add this fine volume to their collection. Newcomers will find *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864* an excellent place to start.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Mark Bradley. Review of Gallagher, Gary, ed. *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. September, 2007.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13590>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.