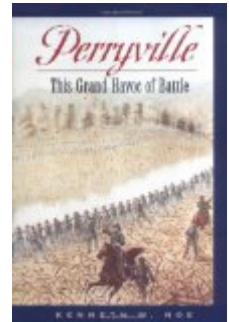


Kenneth W. Noe. *Perryville: This Grand Havoc of Battle*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. xxiv + 494 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-2209-0.



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The Battle for the Border

The Civil War contest for border states and areas, always politically and often militarily ambiguous, presents special interpretive and analytical dilemmas regarding relative political outlook and partisan military activities. The Commonwealth of Kentucky is no exception as its citizens seemed inclined to neutrality as long as possible and to preservation of the Union as it was in 1860, with slavery or with compensation for slaves if emancipated. In the end, three white Kentuckians fought in the United States Army for every one in the Confederate. Enlistment of Blue Grass African Americans swelled the ratio. Besides maintaining the Commonwealth in the Union, the United States viewed the state in strategic terms as a buffer for the Midwestern states' safety and for the Ohio/Mississippi River transportation axis. In addition to normal territorial and resource objectives, Confederates mistakenly saw the Blue Grass as a fertile recruiting ground for needed manpower. The Battle of Perryville, long neglected before the appearance of this volume and with its own

military ambiguities, would determine the Commonwealth's fate.

Post-war Confederates enshrined the eastern theater's importance by developing the Lee/Jackson pantheon to the detriment of the western sector where few glamorous generals operated. When modern historians turned their attention to western military operations and their role, they neglected the Battle of Perryville. This battle, sometimes known as Chaplin Hills, occurred on 8 October 1862 in the wake of the Battle of Antietam and the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation's issuance. For the foreseeable future, Professor Noe of Auburn University has definitively filled the void and has made a convincing case for the battle's importance.

The author's grand review opens with the Union offensive led by Major General George H. Thomas toward East Tennessee through Mill Springs and Major General Don Carlos Buell's occupation of Nashville in February 1862. It surveys the maneuvers and all battles along the line from East Tennessee, through northern Alabama, to Corinth, Mississippi, before the Kentucky cam-

paign. Convinced by vague and exaggerated assurances by Kentuckians and others who erroneously believed that the Commonwealth was sympathetic territory anxiously awaiting liberation, the Confederates under Colonel John Hunt Morgan launched their initial Confederate Blue Grass raid in late July 1862. In August 1862, General Kirby Smith would follow, achieving a notable victory at Richmond. Later in the same month, General Braxton Bragg ably led the Army of Mississippi from the Chattanooga area into Kentucky. In reaction, General Buell, generally following the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, withdrew to Bowling Green and eventually back to the Ohio River to Louisville. After refreshing, re-equipping, and augmenting his troops, General Buell would move against Bragg who had the potential of uniting with cantankerous General Kirby Smith. Accidental convergence would occur just west of Perryville in the Chaplin Hills. All these movements transpired under difficult conditions of severe drought that made water sources and forage inadequate for both armies.

Obliviousness or confusion characterized the actions of both commanding officers, Major General Don Carlos Buell and General Braxton Bragg, who were brothers-in-law. Injured from a fall from his horse and shielded from battlefield noise by an acoustical shadow, Buell, unaware for two hours that a battle was raging and pre-concerned about his plans, reading, and meals, never realized a great battle had been fought. Half of Buell's available force was never engaged. Bragg, who could not merge the troops under General Kirby Smith's independent command which remained to the east, was unaware that he confronted the entire Army of Ohio. Aside from their own shortcomings, Buell experienced failures in his chain of command, and Bragg received faulty reconnaissance reports from subordinates. The battle itself was one of the most savage in the war.

The Battle of Perryville, in immediate terms, ended somewhat inconclusively. In the strictest

military sense, it might be regarded as a tactical Confederate victory until General Braxton Bragg, having lost 30 percent of his troops, abandoned the field the next morning to begin a retreat to Middle Tennessee. This withdrawal through Knoxville marked the recession of the Confederacy from its high water mark in the western theater of military operations. The Confederates had forsaken Kentucky.

Although traditional Civil War battle history has often been narrowly conceived and has resisted incorporation of new historiographic trends, Professor Noe has produced a model study that has comprehensively included a broad picture of military strategy and action as well as larger political issues. He has effectively integrated his narrative with political analysis, informative biographies of all major characters, measured discussion of conflicting interpretations of people and actions, and reconciliation of differing accounts of the same incidents. The battle account, as well as the rendition of the campaign framework, is quite detailed and based on exhaustive research. The author has fleshed out every military nuance in the give-and-take of the campaign and bloody battle and also has incorporated the impact on civilians. In his view of command, strategy, and conflict on both sides, he never ignores the common soldier's plight.

For those who may focus on the Appalachian phase, much military material, though peripheral to the main theme, will be of interest. General Buell, much to the chagrin of President Abraham Lincoln and Unionist Governor Andrew Johnson, never considered East Tennessee strategic to his objectives of maintaining the Nashville-Louisville axis. Nevertheless, Eastern Tennessee, the Cumberland Gap, and eastern Kentucky were always territorial factors in both armies' strategy for control of Kentucky.

Supplemented with fourteen helpful maps and forty-six illustrations, this comprehensive effort constitutes what battle history ought to be. Its

all-encompassing framework examines every aspect of Perryville, including its human and political aftermath and its establishment as an historic site. It exposes the manifold inadequacies of other Civil War investigations of battles and campaigns. In this case, previous neglect of Perryville has been worth the wait for such a sterling result.

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