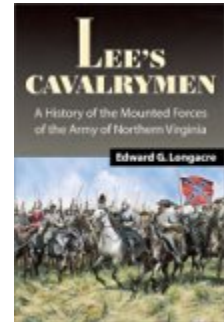


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Edward G. Longacre. *Lee's Cavalrymen: A History of the Mounted Forces of the Army of Northern Virginia*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2002. xii + 468 pp. \$36.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8117-0898-2.

Reviewed by Richard DiNardo (USMC Command and Staff College)
Published on H-CivWar (August, 2004)



Certainly one of the most prolific of popular Civil War authors is Edward Longacre. Over the course of several years, he has written a great many books on cavalry in the Civil War. In 2000, Longacre published *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, which was a history of the mounted forces in the Army of the Potomac. This book is the companion piece to that study.

Lee's Cavalrymen is a narrative history of the cavalry in the Army of Northern Virginia. In this regard, the book works very well; it is a crisply written, fast-paced account of Robert E. Lee's mounted arm. And it is important to note that, in an age when too many works of history read like sociology, Longacre still treats history as a literary craft.

Longacre traces the development of the Army of Northern Virginia's cavalry from its beginnings until the end in 1865. As this is a narrative history, he covers all of the actions in which the cavalry were involved in great detail, ranging from J. E. B. Stuart's victory sealing charge at First Bull Run to the last great adventure enjoyed by Lee's cavalry in the war, namely Wade Hampton's famous "beefsteak raid." He also goes into some detail dealing with the logistical aspects of maintaining the mounted arm, including veterinary care, remount policy and all those other matters relating to the care of horses that generally well known to serious students of the war.

As would be expected of any study of the cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia, the dominating figure in the book is Stuart. This is only proper, as he was the commander of the cavalry from its initial organization until his death in May 1864. Yet it is worth noting that Longacre gives proper attention to the actions of the Cavalry Corps after its recreation by Lee. The Army com-

mander had broken the corps up into two separate divisions after Stuart's death. After a few months time, however, Lee reunited the divisions into a corps, and named Wade Hampton as the new corps commander. This is certainly a welcome departure from the standard treatment of Lee's cavalry, in which too often history stops after Stuart's death.

What is missing, to a great degree, is analysis and some willing skepticism. Two examples of that will suffice here, both of which concern controversial episodes of Stuart's career, namely Brandy Station and the ride around the Union Army in the Gettysburg campaign. Longacre takes it as a given, as so many others have, that Stuart was deeply stung by the criticism voiced in the Richmond newspapers about his conduct at Brandy Station. Yet, one might wonder whether or not he actually had the opportunity to read the newspapers. Since the battle ended after nightfall on June 9, the Richmond papers could not have received the story before June 10 or 11. Given the time needed to print, publish and distribute copies, it would seem unlikely that Stuart would have had access to newspapers carrying the criticism before June 16, 1863, by which time he was already heading north.

The second incident concerns Stuart's controversial ride around the Union Army during the Gettysburg campaign. Longacre might have gone into some detail about Stuart's decision to undertake the trip, given the fact that, after bumping into Hancock's II Corps, Stuart was at least twelve hours behind schedule. In addition, the presence of Hancock's corps moving north could, and did, give Stuart the idea that the entire army was in motion, which introduced considerable complications. Finally, there was the issue of who Stuart did and did not

take with him on the raid. Too often Longacre glosses over these issues and goes for narrative.

The true value of this book, however, is not just its narrative history, but its bibliography. Longacre has done a splendid job in putting together a bibliography of both published and unpublished sources that is really ex-

haustive. This makes the book a very valuable reference work.

In conclusion, this book stands as a good combination of reference work and basic narrative history. For anyone new to the Civil War who wants to learn about cavalry, this is 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-civwar>

Citation: Richard DiNardo. Review of Longacre, Edward G., *Lee's Cavalrymen: A History of the Mounted Forces of the Army of Northern Virginia*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. August, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9725>

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.