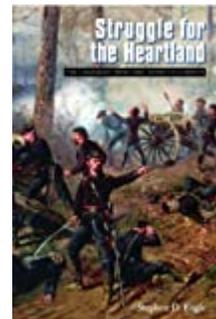


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Stephen D. Engle. *Struggle for the Heartland: The Campaigns from Fort Henry to Corinth.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. xxii + 265 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8032-6753-4.



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An uninspired colleague recently asked me, “How much more can be written about the American Civil War?” It would seem the same question could be asked about an endless number of events from our nation’s history. But the question is not without merit, as we hear increasing groans from those who do not share the passion of Civil War buffs. While some may hope the endless stream of books highlighting the conflict will eventually abate, others will continue to eagerly devour all that is written concerning our nation’s greatest bloodbath. This volume from the University of Nebraska Press suggests that re-packaging the facts may elicit the interest of buffs as well as those ready to see the door on that chapter of history closed. Many recent studies have concentrated on micro-analysis— three hours of the battle of Gettysburg revealed in 350 pages, for example—or such a broad discussion of the entire war that readers often find themselves bogged down in flanking movements or simply too little information on far too many events. In this book, author Stephen Engle skillfully avoids each of these often burdensome approaches. As part of the Great Campaigns of the Civil War series, Engle structures his study both to educate and entertain. While there is plenty of discussion of the battles here, there are fewer micro-descriptions of movements and individual heroics. Engle provides the “big picture” analysis of the campaigns, de-

voting as much space to behind-the-lines maneuvering and command disputes as he does to actual operations on the battlefield. Though readers get less of a sense of what transpired within the minds of individual soldiers, they are offered a much clearer assessment of the larger issues connected to each engagement. The actual fighting at Shiloh receives only a few pages, but the decisions and maneuvering that culminated in the engagement receive more than a chapter. The result is a pleasantly readable volume that will be appreciated by a large audience, especially those with limited understanding of the campaigns conducted in the heartland. As with most books, the author’s decision to emphasize certain processes and events explains the book’s strengths but also invariably results in some corresponding shortcomings. Some readers may find this volume lacking in drama. The death of Albert Sidney Johnston during the battle of Shiloh is treated almost as a footnote, just as the misery of the soldiers engaged in the various battles are treated merely as points of fact. Drama, though, abounds in scores of volumes and often proves to detract from scholarship as much as it entertains the reader. This book offers an excellent brief assessment of a critical series of campaigns that often remain the stepchild of Civil War scholarship. It is a volume that will serve well in Civil War-era coursework just as it will impress general readers.

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