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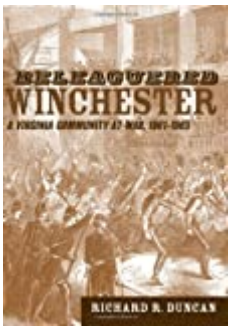

Richard R. Duncan. *Beleaguered Winchester: A Virginia Community at War, 1861-1865.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. xix + 380 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3217-3.

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Playing Both Sides of the Civil War

While most of the United States and the Confederacy experienced directly the effects of the Civil War, citizens of Winchester, Virginia, certainly shouldered more than their share of the pain of war. Located in the heart of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, Winchester was "the key" that could unlock the abundant resources of the region (p. xiii). Both Union and Confederate armies sought the town and surrounding countryside to supply their troops and, in turn, inhibit the enemy. As a result, possession of the town changed hands an estimated seventy-two times, and the townspeople were left with confusingly divided loyalties and struggled for their survival.

Richard R. Duncan's book *Beleaguered Winchester* explains the trauma and turmoil that the residents endured. Duncan elucidates that when the war initially broke out the people of the town supported the Confederacy. As Southerners and Virginians, residents of Winchester fought to resist any Union invasion. However, as the war continued and threats to survival became more imminent, the people of Winchester found themselves siding with the occupying force, whether Union or Confederate.

Duncan utilizes a chronological approach, explaining developments in Winchester's existence throughout the course of the war. This structure illuminates the intriguing ebb and flow of the residents' attitudes regarding the Union. While Southerners living in Winchester were always Virginians and during the war Confederates, they began to understand the Union army. Duncan explains relationships that developed between the townspeople, particularly young ladies, and Union officers. By late 1864 and early 1865, both sides had seen enough of the war and were ready to carry on with life. Beyond that, the destruction had run rampant with the Union army's "hard war" policy, and necessity dictated that the hostilities cease.

The underlying themes of Winchester were location and loyalty. While located in Virginia and the agricultural heart of the Shenandoah Valley, there were also difficulties with nearby West Virginia, which split off in 1863. With its location in northern Virginia, Winchester was, from the perspective of Union officers, "the key that unlocked the door to Richmond" (p. 43). Although the politics of the town were quite divided, their loyalties

in military service were resolute. Duncan reports that Frederick County contributed more than 50 percent of its eligible men to serve in the Confederate army. While there were some in the region who remained loyal to the Union, many residents of Winchester fervently fought with Virginia.

The people of Winchester grew to accept occupying forces. First occupied by the Union army, then frequently changing hands throughout the war, the people began supporting "both sides" of the conflict to survive. The Union army's initial plan was one of conciliation. The U.S. government did not intend to subjugate Southern people, especially because many government officials, such as President Abraham Lincoln, insisted that the vast majority of the Southern populace did not even want this rebellion. However, as the war increased in intensity, Union Generals Robert Milroy, Franz Sigel, and eventually Phillip Sheridan, who all served in the Winchester area, realized that the common people of the Confederacy were helping supply Confederate armies. Because of their support of the armies, the Confederate citizenry became military targets. This introduced the 1864 "hard war" policy, which struck Winchester, along with much of the South, quite severely.

Occupying forces brought with them considerable extra burdens as well. When Confederate armies came into Winchester, the citizenry readily supplied soldiers with food. However, when the federal army occupied the town, their soldiers raided and stole food from homes. Officers, who made their rank and status quite obvious, often paid a fair price for food and services provided by the people, but the citizens were left with no food or supplies. Late in the war when Sheridan brought the Union "hard war" policy to the region, wanton slaughter of animals and resources grew widespread.

Duncan also accents the importance of Winchester as a hospital town. With battles nearby, such as those at Antietam, Gettysburg, Cedar Creek, and Winchester itself, the town became burdened with numerous Confederate and Union wounded. Not only did these men require food and supplies, but they also needed care from local nurses and doctors. Chaos struck Winchester severely following the Gettysburg campaign. Conditions in the town deteriorated rapidly, and the dust was so thick that the sick and wounded were moved to nearby Jordan Springs for recovery.

More than a chronicle of the war's events and their impact on Winchester, Duncan's work portrays a town entrenched in the ugliness of war. Not only did they shoulder the responsibility of contributing troops to the war effort, but the common people on the home front also bore a considerable hardship serving in hospitals, maintaining farms, and sustaining the Confederate war effort. While the story itself is a bit confusing and muddled with the politics of northern Virginia, Civil War scholars cannot ignore the underlying importance of the town and its people. This saga of Winchester could not be told without including the complex political situation that helped fuel the war.

This book highlights the significant contributions made by the people of Winchester as much, if not more, than it details the hard fighting over the town. Rather than dwelling on the trivial fact that it was the most captured town in the Civil War, Duncan examines the intricacies of Winchester's contributions as a Confederate town, including the important Unionists who further complicated local politics. Winchester, in many ways, serves as a microcosm of the war itself, showing that many times the issues were more complex than slavery or states rights. As *Beleaguered Winchester* demonstrates, often geography and outside influences directed the decisions of a people far more than their own desires.

Duncan's study helps historians better understand northern Virginia, Appalachia, and the bitterly contested Valley Campaign. Duncan adeptly interweaves context of the greater war and its impact on civilians, all while explaining significant local events. Including research conducted by historians like Michael Fellman, Noel Fischer, and Mark Grimsley, the author carefully situates this story of Winchester into an ever-expanding compilation of Civil War historiography. Duncan shows that Winchester was a town of consequence, whose people experienced firsthand the reality of "hard war" and the transformation of the Civil War from a policy of conciliation to total war.

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