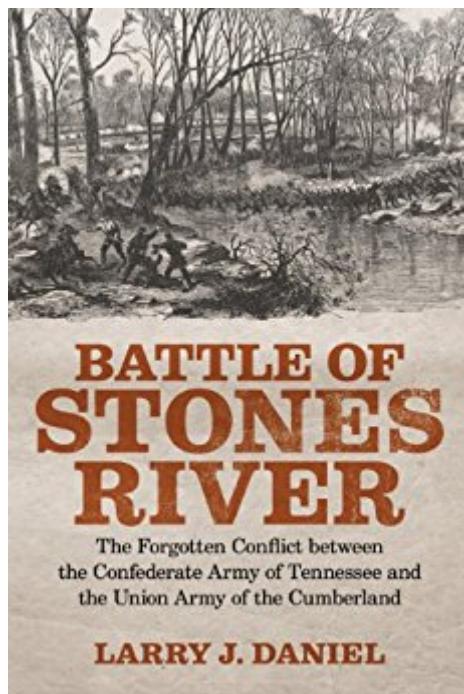


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Battle Of Stones River: The Forgotten Conflict Between The Confederate Army Of Tennessee And The Union Army Of The Cumberland



Synopsis

Three days of savage and bloody fighting between Confederate and Union troops at Stones River in Middle Tennessee ended with nearly 25,000 casualties but no clear victor. The staggering number of killed or wounded equaled the losses suffered in the well-known Battle of Shiloh. Using previously neglected sources, Larry J. Daniel rescues this important campaign from obscurity. The Battle of Stones River, fought between December 31, 1862, and January 2, 1863, was a tactical draw but proved to be a strategic northern victory. According to Daniel, Union defeats in late 1862—“both at Chickasaw Bayou in Mississippi and at Fredericksburg, Virginia”—transformed the clash in Tennessee into a much-needed morale booster for the North. Daniel’s study of the battle’s two antagonists, William S. Rosecrans for the Union Army of the Cumberland and Braxton Bragg for the Confederate Army of Tennessee, presents contrasts in leadership and a series of missteps. Union soldiers liked Rosecrans’s personable nature, whereas Bragg acquired a reputation as antisocial and suspicious. Rosecrans had won his previous battle at Corinth, and Bragg had failed at the recent Kentucky Campaign. But despite Rosecrans’s apparent advantage, both commanders made serious mistakes. With only a few hundred yards separating the lines, Rosecrans allowed Confederates to surprise and route his right wing. Eventually, Union pressure forced Bragg to launch a division-size attack, a disastrous move. Neither side could claim victory on the battlefield. In the aftermath of the bloody conflict, Union commanders and northern newspapers portrayed the stalemate as a victory, bolstering confidence in the Lincoln administration and dimming the prospects for the “peace wing” of the northern Democratic Party. In the South, the deadlock led to continued bickering in the Confederate western high command and scorn for Braxton Bragg.

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Customer Reviews

I found this book to be most excellent, and an enjoyable read. The author managed beautifully to convey both the general picture--the seesawing nature of the battle as a whole--and the detailed, individual fights at various hot spots in which sometimes one side, sometimes the other, prevailed. I now understand how excruciatingly crucial this battle was for both General Rosecrans and General Bragg. But the best part is how the author lets the combatants speak to us, transmitting their immediate impressions, fears, disgust, confusion, exhilaration, desperation, horror. He also mines many precious, delicious details, such as General McCook's galloping to the front with shaving lather covering his face, and the "wounded piano." I appreciate his efforts to sift through questionable or contradictory source material in an attempt to discern and clarify the truth behind prior misconceptions or controversies. And speaking of controversies, he dealt fairly with the post-battle imbroglio between Bragg and his immediate subordinates. His treatment provided me with new insights into the personalities involved. However, I felt that his statement "In June [1863] Bragg sustained a complete physical and mental breakdown, although he continued to maintain command" (p. 210) was inaccurate, or at least way too simplistic. Bragg suffered from chronic health problems and many stresses arose that month, but on June 20 he wrote his wife (who had been gravely ill herself) that he felt better than he had in some time.

A very good account of the bloody Stones River battle, though not at the level of other writers such as Shea & Hess (Pea Ridge), Cozzens (Chattanooga), or Smith (Shiloh and Champion Hill). This author does a fine job describing the run-up to the battle, blow-by-blow accounts of the action, and the main personalities and their interactions, which largely determined the outcome of this battle. Although the Confederate Army under Bragg had the Union Army reeling from a massive attack on the Union's right flank on day one, the attack ran out of steam due to heavy casualties, exhaustion, and piecemeal attacks toward the end of the day on determined Union troops who had

consolidated their defensive line and used artillery effectively. Two days later, Bragg ordered a major attack on the opposite flank of the Union, which turned into a rout when the rebels ran into an overwhelming barrage of artillery and a Union counterattack, resulting in an overnight retreat by the rebel army. Although casualties were similar for both sides (roughly 13,000), the casualty rate for the rebels was higher because of their smaller force, and a higher percentage of Union casualties encompassed prisoners captured by the fast-moving rebels during day one. A large number of brigade and regimental commanders were killed or wounded on both sides, indicating the ferocity and close quarters of this battle. I agree with one reviewer in that a couple of additional maps showing the entire battlefield and changing of lines would have been beneficial to the readers understanding of this complex battle, vs only a single map of the battlefield prior to the initial action, with only additional maps of individual actions.

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