

## Book Reviews

Edited by Tom Costa

Department of History and Philosophy  
The University of Virginia's College at Wise

*Banners to the Breeze: The Kentucky Campaign, Corinth, and Stones River.* By Earl J. Hess. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 263 pp.

*Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant.* Edited by William C. Davis and Meredith L. Swentor. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 716 pp.

*Perryville: This Grand Havoc of Battle.* By Kenneth W. Noc. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 494 pp.

Despite the mass of literature on the American Civil War, it seems that historians have largely forgotten Kentucky. While every year sees numerous new scholarly and popular works on the men and battles of the Civil War, very little attention is paid to the border states which declared and attempted to maintain neutrality throughout the conflict. Such was the case with Kentucky, and while only a handful of strategically significant battles were fought there, it can be argued that no other state occupied a more prominent position in the war. Each of the conflicting sides wanted Kentucky's official allegiance and the use of its manpower. Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis could both call Kentucky "home." Also significant was the strategic importance of the Ohio River and its southern tributaries to each army. And, as a slave state, Kentucky's support could, depending on the side it took, either repudiate or define the nature of the Civil War in the eyes of onlookers. To help answer some of the central questions regarding Kentucky's involvement in the conflict, a handful of very interesting books have recently been published.

The three books under examination in this essay reflect the broad differences in approach and interpretation that can be seen in modern Civil War studies. Earl J. Hess's *Banners to the Breeze: The Kentucky Campaign, Corinth, and Stones River* is a campaign history that not only addresses the fight for Kentucky, but the extension of that fight throughout Tennessee and into northern Mississippi. Kenneth W. Noe's *Perryville: This Grand Havoc of Battle* examines one of the most important contests of the war. And, perhaps the most interesting of the works under review, *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant*, edited by William C. Davis and Meredith L. Swentor, looks at the war from ground level through the eyes of Guerrant, who served as a general's aide in the mountains of eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia.

One significant, and often legitimate, criticism of Civil War studies can be that historians often spend far too much time delving into microhistory, rather than seeking broad examination and the larger answers that result. Earl J. Hess's *Banners to the Breeze* examines the Kentucky Campaign of 1862 that not only penetrated the Bluegrass State on numerous fronts, but extended later into middle Tennessee and parts of Mississippi. Hess, whose previous works reflect a broad regional and intellectual interest in the Civil War, outlines Confederate General Braxton Bragg's plan to bring Kentucky into the Confederate fold. Bragg, like many southerners, felt that a handful of prominent Unionists were withholding Kentucky from the Confederacy. Upon invasion, Bragg expected his army to play a dual role: as protectors of the state from Union harassment and as trainers of the mass of recruits who would then feel safe joining the southern army. Neither of these events unfolded as Bragg had planned. First, Edmund Kirby Smith undermined the coordinated attack on Kentucky by executing an exceptionally well-organized passage through the tight Cumberland Gap and drove very quickly into the Bluegrass region while Bragg's main force was still moving through Tennessee. Perhaps more surprising was the failure of Confederate recruiting efforts once in Kentucky. The expected deluge never materialized.

Despite Hess' flowing narrative of the campaign, one cannot help but believe that by broadening his approach, the author could have gleaned more from his study. *Banners to the Breeze* is an exhaustive military history, yet in these days of social and economic impact, Hess does not attempt to include these factors into his work. With his concentration on battle lines and troop movements, it appears that Hess has turned the possibility of a

contribution of macrohistory into just another microhistorical study. He does attempt to reexamine Braxton Bragg and spends considerable time discussing the progress of the war in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, but in the end, *Banners to the Breeze* is little different from James Lee McDonough's *War in Kentucky* (1994).

Scholars of Kentucky's Civil War have been anxiously awaiting Kenneth Noe's examination of the Battle of Perryville. As the high-water mark of Bragg's campaign, Perryville served as the pivot point of the Civil War in Kentucky. Able commanders on both sides often prevent the decisive victory that Napoleonic warfare teaches. The same result can also occur when two mediocre commanders meet on the battlefield. Such was the case at Perryville. The Union's Don Carlos Buell and the Confederacy's Braxton Bragg both had long careers behind them and good military reputations, although neither had distinguished himself in battle in any significant way. At Perryville, the two men counteracted each other in a variety of ways. Bragg negated his numerical advantage by dividing his army and sending half of his 32,000 men to Frankfort to protect the provisional Confederate government from what he thought was Buell's full army, which turned out to be only a small feinting force. Back at Perryville, the 16,000 remaining Confederate troops were ready to meet a surprisingly large Union force of 22,000 with even more in reserve. With a larger and healthier force, Buell stood on the cusp of a great victory, but managed to snatch defeat from its jaws. Sound refraction caused by wind direction and the hilly terrain produced an acoustic shadow that limited the range of sound that Buell and his command could hear. As a result, Bragg attacked only part of Buell's army and the Union command never knew of the battle until it was nearly over.

Noe's work on Perryville is thorough and well-researched. He gives the battle its due as one of the bloodiest of the Civil War with regard to the number of men engaged and attempts to answer significant questions that have plagued the contest. Perhaps most important, Noe attempts to place Perryville within not only the Kentucky Campaign of which it was part, but within the whole of the war. For the most part he succeeds, but as is the case with military history, little information about the regional implications of the battle is supplied.

The best history often comes in a simple form. When Edward O. Guerrant, a schoolteacher from central Kentucky, joined the Confederate army, he did so with high ideals in mind and a calling to fight for what

he saw as a good and just cause. Four years later, he left the collapsed Confederacy disgruntled and unsure about the righteousness of his cause. William C. Davis and Meredith L. Swentor edited the volumes of Guerrant's diaries held in private hands and his other papers in the custody of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and in the collections of the Filson Club in Louisville, Kentucky. What they gleaned from the Guerrant diaries is a primary account of the complex war for eastern Kentucky as prosecuted by men more pragmatic than highly idealistic.

*Bluegrass Confederate* might be the most significant contribution to the Civil War in Appalachia to date. It is bottom-up history written by a man caught between the command structure and the fighting apparatus, and it deals with the war in one of its least understood arenas. Most of Guerrant's service was spent in eastern Kentucky and in extreme southwest Virginia. In such areas, little today is known about the wartime conditions. Within the pages of his diary, Guerrant not only deals with the details of his military service and daily activities, but enlightens the reader as to the state of the area and the people from the mountain communities. The reader can follow Guerrant's slow and logical dissatisfaction with his Confederate service, from his eager enlistment to his realization that Morgan's Raiders were little more than common rogues.

Taken together, these three works paint what appears to be a more comprehensive portrait of the Civil War in Kentucky than previous efforts have done. Starting with Hess' broad strokes and focusing the picture with Noe's story of Perryville, and then adding Guerrant's experience, readers should see the different levels on which the war was fought and the various scholarly approaches to Civil War studies. While these additions make considerable contributions to the genre, it must be understood that Kentucky's Civil War remains a neglected topic. The only comprehensive work on the state's experience is more than seventy-five years old and most of the existing monographs lack considerable scholarship. Despite the subject's spotty history, the three works examined here indicate that Kentucky's comprehensive story is on the path to being told in the coming years.

Brian D. McKnight  
Mississippi State University