

Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864. By Albert Castel. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992. Pp. xvi, 665. Maps, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

Pea Ridge: Civil War Campaign in the West. By William L. Shea and Earl J. Hess. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. Pp. xiii, 417. Maps, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga. By Peter Cozzens. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Pp. xii, 675. Maps, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95.)

These three new tactical studies of major Civil War campaigns are representative of the burgeoning rush of Civil War literature. Civil War readers are reasonably apprehensive about this rush. There are already hints that a dominating economic motive may be driving this process and may cause a decline in the quality of the genre. Fortunately, the three books under review are not involved in that indictment.

The distinguished Albert Castel's Atlanta book is nothing short of excellent. Begun in May, 1864, under Sherman's command, the campaign was one of the several prongs of newly-appointed General-in-Chief Grant's effort to subdue the Confederacy. The author has a sound grasp of the importance of the war in the West and the logistical, military, political, and morale significance of the Atlanta campaign. Conventional accounts have suggested that the Federal progress from Dalton to Atlanta was essentially a matter of maneuver. The book reminds the reader that in fact there was much fighting along the way, at Pickett's Mill and Dallas and other previously ignored battlefields. Among several persuasive revisionist themes, the most striking concerns Sherman, whom the author faults for candor, strategic capacity, and tactics and compares unfavorably to General George H. Thomas. Castel notes that Sherman unilaterally modified Grant's intent for the campaign. Grant wanted Sherman to destroy the Army of Tennessee. Sherman concentrated instead on the more modest objective of capturing Atlanta.

On the Confederate side, the major figures of the campaign were Generals Joseph E. Johnston and John Bell Hood and President Jefferson Davis. General Braxton Bragg was also active as Davis's military advisor. Castel appropriately labels Johnston "overrated" and Hood "overaggressive." These leaders did not cooperate among themselves, and the controversy among them was a factor in the Confederate defeat. Johnston simply ignored the instructions of his government. Having disloyally undermined

Johnston, Hood replaced Johnston late in the campaign and failed in the ultimate battles at Atlanta. As the author makes clear, the fall of Atlanta on September 1 and 2, 1864, was a major factor in Lincoln's reelection. The campaign was therefore literally a "decision in the West."

Implicit, and sometimes explicit, in Castel's evaluation of the military leaders in the campaign is his admiration of General Robert E. Lee's leadership in the East. This reviewer rejects Lee as *the* criterion of generalship. Frequently a brilliant tactician, Lee's grand strategic sense of the war was premised on the military defeat of the North, an unlikely goal, rather than on wearing out the North's will to fight, a realizable objective. This led him to aggressiveness that produced disproportionate, irreplaceable, and unaffordable casualties destructive to the Confederacy's chances of victory. Regardless of the Lee issue, which is not central to the Atlanta campaign, Castel's book is wonderfully researched and written, has refreshing original insights, and is plainly a definitive work on the campaign.

The 1862 Pea Ridge campaign, pitting the Federal Army of the Southwest against the Confederate Army of the West, has never been adequately reported. Indeed, William L. Shea and Earl J. Hess have provided the first detailed account of this campaign in southwestern Missouri and northwestern Arkansas. It is an exceptional work. One suspects that the campaign has been overlooked in part because of historians' undue emphasis on the war in the Virginia theater and preoccupation with the romanticized eastern battles involving the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia. As the authors accurately state, the "victory at Pea Ridge was the turning point of Federal efforts to dominate the Trans-Mississippi" (p. 308). Fought in the depths of winter and fraught with almost unbelievable logistical difficulties, the campaign featured remarkably valiant soldiers and an interesting array of general officers. Principal among the latter was the underrated General Samuel R. Curtis, the Federal commander, and the erratic Federal General Franz Sigel. General Earl Van Dorn incompetently led the southern participants.

The research base of the book is impressive, and the book is marked by the authors' fine strategic grasp and capacity to present a complex campaign with great clarity. The reader discovers that the resolute Curtis anticipated Sherman's strategy of foraging and living off the country. Curtis also emancipated slaves without hesitation, and his actions were not reversed or criticized by the Washington administration. The significance of the campaign is accurately characterized: "By the time Curtis led his dusty blue column into Helena in the summer of 1862, Missouri was safe for the Union, half of Arkansas was lost to the Confederacy, and the strategic balance in the Mississippi Valley was altered permanent-

ly" (p. 306). In presenting this decisive campaign the authors have made a significant contribution to the scholarship of the war.

Chickamauga, the only marked Confederate victory in the west, was a bloody melee in which neither army commander had control of his army. For the Federal Army of the Cumberland the commander was the mercurial Major General William S. Rosecrans. His command opponent was the ill-fated General Braxton Bragg, commander of the Army of Tennessee. The battle also featured Rosecrans's lieutenant, Major General George H. Thomas, who was to replace Rosecrans in command of the army after the battle, and Lieutenant General James Longstreet who brought several brigades of his corps from the Army of Northern Virginia to the event. It was Thomas's dogged defense at Snodgrass Hill on the second day of the battle, after Rosecrans and much of the Federal army had retreated to Chattanooga, that saved the Federals from a total defeat and the loss of Chattanooga.

Peter Cozzens has written of the battle in the way it happened, in segments, detailing the unsystematic fighting even at the regimental level. As a consequence, the larger context of events and of the battle as a whole is sometimes obscured by detail. At the command level, Cozzens has fine insights into the problematic Rosecrans, and he details the controversy in the Confederate army that continuously surrounded Braxton Bragg, including President Jefferson Davis's post-battle inept efforts to quiet the controversy between Bragg and his commanders. These accounts underline two major Confederate tragedies. As Bell I. Wiley once wrote, "strife was the Confederacy's evil genius and no major organization or activity escaped its crippling influence."¹ And the valiant and gutsy Army of Tennessee never had the kind of leadership that it was entitled to and which could have reversed its doleful history of defeat and losses. An immediate consequence of this lack was the failure of the Confederates to realize on the promise of the Chickamauga victory. The Union held on to Chattanooga and in November decisively defeated Bragg's army at Missionary Ridge.

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¹ Bell I. Wiley, *The Road to Appomattox* (Memphis, 1956), 98-99.