

Larry J. Daniel. Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997, 430 pp.

Civil War historians and buffs often overlook Shiloh, focusing more attention on larger and seemingly more important battles in the Civil War's eastern theater. But as Larry Daniel demonstrates in his fine new study, Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War, this engagement in southwestern Tennessee had great political and military significance. The two-day battle in early April 1862 marked dramatic turning points for major Civil War figures like Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, P.G.T. Beauregard and Braxton Bragg. It cost the life of the controversial Albert Sidney Johnston and contributed to the Confederacy's loss of the Mississippi and the Tennessee River Valley. It was a battle, Daniel argues, the Confederacy could ill afford to lose, but lose they did.

Other historians have examined Shiloh before, but Daniel is the first to place the battle in its broadest military and political context. He begins his book by shifting from Richmond to Washington, D.C., reminding readers of larger political issues that directly affected the battle's strategy, leaders and outcome. Nine days after Shiloh the Confederacy initiated its first draft. And when a wave of criticism rose against U.S. Grant, Abraham Lincoln pointed to the general's performance at Shiloh and Fort Donelson to declare: "I can't spare this man; He fights" (quoted on p. 308).

Daniel has his own interpretations to offer that differ from those of other students of the battle. He argues that there were eight Confederate attacks made at the Hornet's Nest, not eleven or fourteen; that Ruggle's massive artillery barrage did not have as great an effect on the Union line as is often thought, and that perhaps Lew Wallace's late arrival on the battlefield on April 6 was due to his misguided belief that he could take a different route and dramatically destroy the Confederate army. Daniel disagrees with those who argue that the Confederates could have amassed a successful final attack late on April 6; nor does he believe that the loss of Johnston weakened the South's chances for victory.

Daniel is critical of most of Shiloh's major players. He blasts Grant for his post-battle exaggerations and "half-truths," Sherman for his refusal to admit that he was caught entirely by surprise on April 6; Johnston for his irresponsibility, insecurities and personal recklessness; Beauregard for his egotism, faulty battle plan and loss of nerve; and Bragg for his stubborn faith in costly frontal attacks. He faults Confederate leaders for wasting the element of surprise, over-committing troops on the left, and losing precious time and men in the fight for the Hornet's Nest. He blames the petty jealousies and tender egos of Federal commanders for seriously affecting troop movement and coordination. But Daniel also praises Grant and Sherman for their poise and courage on the battlefield, and Grant's

determination to counterattack on April 7. He credits the ailing Beauregard for ensuring a safe evacuation of Confederate troops from Columbus, Kentucky, and successfully concentrating Southern forces at Corinth. Only Albert Sidney Johnston emerges from the book with little or no praise from the author.

Although Daniel primarily focuses on generals, he does intersperse his narrative with the words of privates and small unit commanders. He concludes that the lesser known soldiers were Shiloh's heroes; men like Illinois Captain Allen Waterhouse, who fought gallantly to protect his battery; Colonel Henry Allen, who personally led his Louisiana regiment within fifty feet of the Union line; and Colonel David Stuart, who struggled to hold the extreme left of the Union line.

Shiloh's 23,000 casualties surpassed American losses in all previous wars combined, including the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. Northerners and Southerners were stunned. Yet, as Larry Daniel writes: "Shiloh would soon be eclipsed by more horrific battles, but at Shiloh the Nation had taken its first gasp" (p. 317). Daniel's well-written, solidly researched and dramatic narrative shows us why.

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