

1998

## Review: Bentonville: The Final Battle of Sherman and Johnston

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### Recommended Citation

Hall, Cline Edwin, "Review: Bentonville: The Final Battle of Sherman and Johnston" (1998). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 8.

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attraction was a desire for action and a willingness to take chances. Working together, the three gradually developed and executed the strategy that led to the capture of Vicksburg and the closing of the river to the Confederacy.

One of Hearn's most striking observations concerns similarities between Porter and the political general Benjamin F. Butler that were revealed when the two leaders were assigned to cooperate in the capture of Fort Fisher at the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Both men were, Hearn notes, "intellectually gifted and independent thinkers whose talent for innovation ranged from the brilliant to the absurd" (p. 274). The two worked well together until the time came to carry through with their plans. Then Porter's push for action conflicted with Butler's sluggishness and brought them to a parting of the ways. Butler's successor in the Fort Fisher operation, Major General Alfred H. Terry, was one of the few volunteer officers for whom Porter retained respect after service together. The key was a willingness to fight.

Porter's career during the Civil War was brilliant. His rise from lieutenant to rear admiral paralleled that of George A. Custer, but Porter's role was of much greater importance. Unlike the army, which had to contend with Reconstruction and pacifying the frontier, the navy had no clear mission following the war, and the remainder of Porter's career lacked the excitement of his younger days. His service as head of the naval academy and his involvement in bureaucratic maneuvers regarding the role of the navy are of interest only to specialists, and Hearn wisely offers only a brief summary of Porter's last years.

Hearn is careful in the claims that he makes for Porter's importance and takes note of his flaws. The research is solid, and the book is quite readable. The maps have been copied from Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel's *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, 1887-88) and the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (30 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1894-1922) and could be improved. Otherwise, this is a fine volume and probably the last biography of David Dixon Porter that we will need for some time to come.

Tarleton State University

MICHAEL D. PIERCE

*Bentonville: The Final Battle of Sherman and Johnston.* By Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes Jr. Civil War America. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, c. 1996. Pp. xxii, 336. \$37.50, ISBN 0-8078-2281-7.)

Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes Jr. has probably written the definitive work on the battle of Bentonville, the final battle between Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston and Union General William T. Sherman. This engagement was the conclusion of the long process of Sherman's invasion of the South, which began at Atlanta in June 1864, moved to Savannah, and through the Carolinas.

For those individuals who like to follow the development of a battle regiment by regiment, this is the book to read since the author details in an easily followed manner the placement of troops over the three-day period of March 19 through 21, 1865. One almost experiences the trauma of the battle and participates in the decisions made by the leading generals.

But Hughes does more than that—he places the battle in the context of the closing days of the Confederacy. Brief biographical vignettes of the major participants help the reader to understand not only what expertise and knowledge the generals brought to the battle but also what inadequacies and personal antagonisms existed among the leadership. The final chapter adequately analyzes the motivations and qualifications of the leading generals on both sides and evaluates their tactics, successful or not. Those generals who do not come off well are Braxton Bragg, William P. Carlin, Jefferson C. Davis, and Lafayette McLaws.

It is Hughes's contention that Sherman's main objective was to occupy Goldsboro, north of the Neuse River, unite with Generals John M. Schofield and Alfred H. Terry from the East, and assist Ulysses S. Grant against Robert E. Lee in Virginia. Therefore, Sherman underestimated the forces under Johnston, did not believe he would attack, and considered Johnston to be a mere nuisance in his march northward. With Goldsboro on his mind, Sherman exposed the left wing of his army, which was then open to attack by an entrenched Johnston. On the other hand, Johnston thought that he could take on Sherman's left wing and, even against great odds, cripple the rest of Sherman's army. Besides, Johnston needed to prove that the Army of Tennessee was capable of successfully taking the offensive, in spite of the history of this army in the West.

The book is well illustrated and has a series of maps that help the reader follow the action. One is still confused, however, about the location of Black River and Black Creek and other minor sites; knowledge of those positions would have been helpful in understanding the engagement. The appendix includes the military organization of the forces on both sides as well as vignettes explaining what happened to key officers after Bentonville. The book is adequately documented with eighty pages of notes and bibliography.

Questions still linger, however, as to why Johnston thought he could stop Sherman, and why Johnston allowed his army to remain on the field on the second and third days in spite of the odds against it, and, even yet, why Sherman did not use his superior forces to drive Johnston from the field on March 21? There are no adequate answers, and Hughes offers none, except to use the metaphor that Bentonville represented the Confederacy itself, "bright hopes drowned in dark swamp water" (p. 231). To Hughes, Sherman's failure to press the fight was "the capstone of his magnificent Carolina Campaign" (p. 230), and for Johnston, Bentonville represented an opportunity for "inspired military leadership" that failed.

An alternative view with more personal interest stories and details of Sherman's advance through the Carolinas preceding Bentonville is presented by Mark L. Bradley in *Last Stand in the Carolinas: The Battle of Bentonville* (Campbell, Calif., 1996).

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CLINE E. HALL

*Sherman's Horsemen: Union Cavalry Operations in the Atlanta Campaign.*

By David Evans. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, c. 1996. Pp. xxxviii, 645. \$40.00, ISBN 0-253-32963-9.)