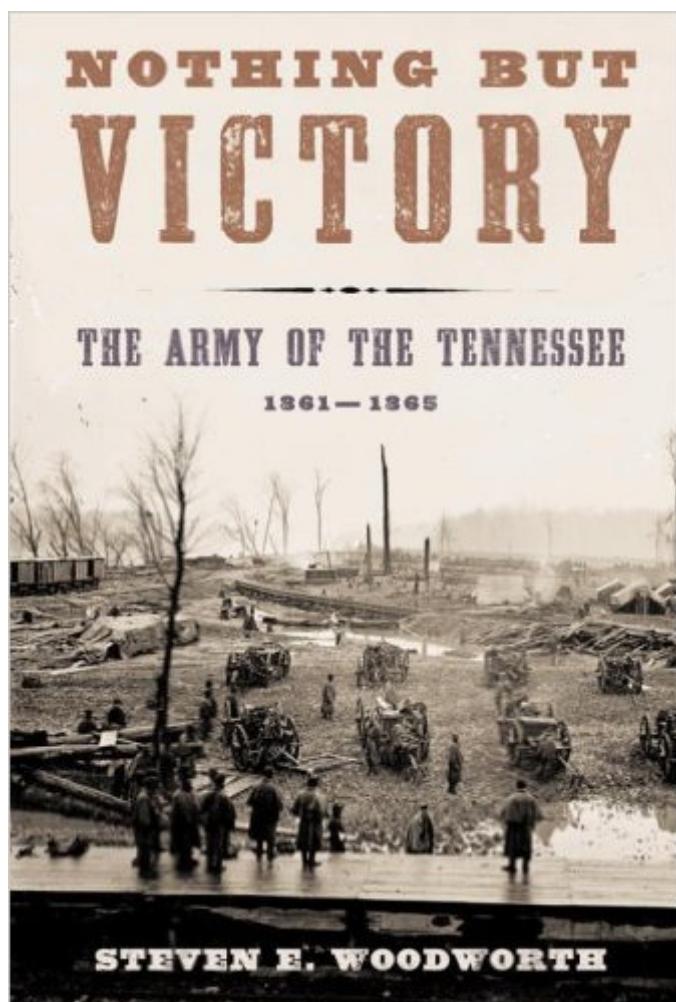


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Nothing But Victory: The Army Of The Tennessee, 1861-1865



Synopsis

In this first full consideration of the remarkable Union army that effectively won the Civil War, historian Steven Woodworth tells the engrossing story of its victory by drawing on letters, diaries, and newspaper accounts of the time. The Army of the Tennessee operated in the Mississippi River Valley through the first half of the Civil War, winning major victories at the Confederate strongholds of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg. The army was created at Cairo, Illinois, in the summer of 1861 and took shape under the firm hand of Ulysses S. Grant, who molded it into a hard-hitting, self-reliant fighting machine. Woodworth takes us to its winter 1863 encampment in the Louisiana swamps, where the soldiers suffered disease, hardship, and thousands of deaths. And we see how the force emerged from that experience even tougher and more aggressive than before. With the decisive victory at Vicksburg, the Army of the Tennessee had taken control of the Mississippi away from the Confederates and could swing east to aid other Union troops in a grand rolling up of Rebel defenses. It did so with a confidence born of repeated success, even against numerical odds, leading one of its soldiers to remark that he and his comrades expected "nothing but victory." The Army of the Tennessee contributed to the Union triumph at Chattanooga in the fall of 1863 and then became part of William Tecumseh Sherman's combined force in the following summer's march to Atlanta. In the complicated maneuvering of that campaign, Sherman referred to the army as his whiplash and used it whenever fast marching and arduous fighting were especially needed. Just outside Atlanta, it absorbed the Confederacy's heaviest counterblow and experienced its hardest single day of combat. Thereafter, it continued as part of Sherman's corps in his March to the Sea and his campaign through the Carolinas. The story of this army is one of perseverance in the face of difficulty, courage amid severe trials, resolute lessons in fighting taught by equally courageous foes, and the determination of a generation of young men to see a righteous cause all the way through to victory. Nothing but Victory is an important addition to the literature of the Civil War.

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Customer Reviews

"Nothing But Victory" is one of the finest and most ambitious books on the Civil War to be published in recent memory. The book is a comprehensive, one-volume operational history of the Army of the Tennessee, the Union army which operated in the the Mississippi valley and was, amazingly enough, successful in almost all of its battles. Woodworth covers campaign material, the experience of soldiering, of the army's day to day life, and the inner workings of the army's leadership as well, striking a balance between the army's commanders and the stories of individual field soldiers. Woodworth's central thesis is that the success of the army came from its cohesiveness - soldiers that trusted their commanders, commanders that aggressively used their command, and leaders that trusted each other and the abilities of the Army. The Army of the Tennessee's coherence and confidence were powerful force multipliers. Woodworth argues convincingly that the AotT was a standout force due to its aggressive commanders, notably Grant and Sherman, working within in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Woodworth highlights a counterexample -- General McClelernand and his scheming and politicking -- to illustrate internal conflicts that were far more prevalent in the Army of the Potomac. McClelernand was the exception in the AotT, though. The other aspect of the Army's success was that Grant's strategy was built to take advantage of success. In other words, Grant's military options assumed that his forces were capable veterans, and that used aggressively they would unbalance their opponent. After initial Union victories and Confederate defeats, the cycle became self-fulfilling, as Confederate morale plummeted and Grant kept pressing this advantage.

Reading the publication hype one gets the impression that you are getting a formal organizational history of the Army of the Tennessee. It's pretty apparent that's not the thrust of the book once you start reading. This is a memorial narrative of campaigning as seen through the eyes of the participants. Most of the book is a litany of battles. The larger perspective of Grand Operational affairs is scarcely bridged. My first impulse is to disagree with this approach. It oversimplifies the reality of the period. For example. I get annoyed with the statement that western armies were

smaller than the Army of the Potomac. Do all readers know that the Army of the Potomac was the only free standing field army built by the Union? Typically Military Departments were created to manage theaters of war and troops were allocated to the Departments. It was up to the Department Commander to determine the size of his field force consonant with risks and means he had on hand. The Army of the Tennessee was an adjunct of the Department of the Tennessee and often contained less than half the troops that were in the Department, which extended over parts of five states. There are some rather serious constraints imposed on this book as to its scope. Whether that was the authors choice or driven by the publisher I can't say. If you are willing to take what is offered at face value there is some very good writing and interesting perspectives to be had here. Regards graphics. The scope of the book makes such impracticable for a single volume work. And Steven Woodworth should be given credit for a woodcraft that overcomes the absence of such.

This is an excellent and needed book in Civil War literature. Too many folks seem to think the war was entirely in Virginia, between the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac. In fact, much of importance took place in the Western Theatre, where one of the principal Union armies was the Army of the Tennessee. It is almost shocking to consider that, until this book, no one had written a history of the Army of the Tennessee. The army is mostly associated with U.S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman; it was formed from the force that Grant used to seize Paducah, Kentucky, in the early days of the war and grew to the force that took Forts Henry and Donelson, fought the savage action of Shiloh, took Vicksburg, fought the Battle of Atlanta, and then marched to the sea. The men came from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, and Kentucky. (There was even a regiment from Nebraska!) The book starts out very well. Woodworth describes the war fever in the Midwest which led so many men into the ranks and provided the army with many of its leaders. He then progresses into the narrative of campaigns, first under Grant, then under Sherman. As a summary story of the western theatre of the war, the book is outstanding. Alas, the book is not perfect. Many have commented on the lack of maps, a criticism I share. Woodworth's focus is also uneven.

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