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Peter Cozzens meticulously traces the chain of events as the Army of the Cumberland and the Army of Tennessee meet in Middle Tennessee on New Year's Eve 1862 in one of the bloodiest encounters of the Civil War.

A mere handful of battlefields have come to epitomize the anguish and pain of America's Civil War: Gettysburg, Shiloh, Chancellorsville, Chickamauga. Yet another name belongs on that infamous list: Stones River, the setting for Peter Cozzens's *No Better Place to Die*.

No Better Place to Die: The Battle Of Stones River Details

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From Reader Review No Better Place to Die: The Battle Of Stones River for online ebook

Justin says

Bring your own set of maps to augment what this book offers.

Josh Liller says

Cozzens has become one of the best known and most beloved modern Civil War authors. This was his first book, written in the early 1980s, but like his peer Stephen Sears he hit the ground running. Stones River (aka Murfreesboro) was actually one of the largest and bloodiest battles in the western theater of the American Civil War. Until this book, I don't think the battle had gotten much study. It is now better appreciated, although still overshadowed by the other major battles like Shiloh, Chickamauga, and Chattanooga. Cozzens style hasn't changed much: this is a well-written regiment-level study like his later works.

The challenge with these sorts of books is balancing the details with the bigger picture. The sequential and linear nature of this battle makes it easier than say Chickamauga, although a few times I still found myself a bit confused.

Larry Daniel has a new book out on the battle which I just started reading so I'll be curious to compare it to this older work.

Dorothy Countryman says

I knew Stones River only by name from our family history. *No Better Place to Die* is a thorough but sometimes technically difficult discussion of the battle. It has been very helpful in my research and will be a great book for someone with an intense interest in this battle and its key players. I found it less clear in terms of its maps even though I had walked the field just before I started reading it. Not a good choice for the Civil War novice, but a good text for those already practiced in the military language of the war.

Theo Logos says

Few major battles of the Civil War have been more neglected than Stones River. It was among the bloodiest battles of the war, and started a ripple effect that would end with the defeat of the South, yet there are less than half a dozen books on it, and only the most devoted students of the war know much of anything about it. Peter Cozzens' book, 'No Better Place to Die', is perhaps the best single book detailing and explaining the significance of this nearly forgotten battle.

December of 1862 had been a very bad month for the Union. General Burnside and the Army of the Potomac had been horribly defeated at the Battle of Fredericksburg, and Grant and Sherman had been stopped cold in their attempt to take Vicksburg. The Union badly needed a victory, and another defeat could have been disastrous. Stones River was fought between the Union's Army of the Cumberland and the

Confederate's Army of Tennessee over three days; from New Years Eve 1862 till January 2, 1863. Though the battle was considered by many to be a tactical draw, and both sides claimed victory, General Bragg and his Army of Tennessee retreated, conceding middle Tennessee to The Army of the Cumberland and the Union, and setting the stage for opening up the back door to the heart of the Confederacy. Though many today have forgotten the significance of this battle, its importance was not lost on President Lincoln, who after the battle wrote to General Rosecrans, commander of the Union forces at Stones River, "I can never forget whilst I remember anything, that... you gave us a hard-earned victory, which had there been a defeat instead, the Nation could scarcely have lived over."

Cozzens is no great wordsmith, but his research is meticulous and his detail is exacting. 'No Better Place to Die' is not so dry as the previous book of his that I have read, perhaps because though detailed, it is still a short book (just over 200 pages), and because he uses many interesting quotes from participants in the battle that add the color that his own words lack. It is, in my opinion, the best, clearest, and most detailed book on this important battle, and anyone who wants to seriously study the Civil War and understand how it was won in the western theater can ill afford to miss it.

Iain says

A well written study of an rarely covered battle. Cozzens' is not a masterpiece, but I'd happily read another book by him if it were on a topic of interest.

Mark says

An interesting guide through a confusing battle. The maps are not as helpful as they might be, but the writing is clear and readable, and it's well-annotated.

Tripp says

A great military history of a lesser battle from the lesser known front in the Civil War. Stones River saw the Army of the Cumberland clash with the Army of the Tennessee in the deep winter. Like many Civil War battles there are many excellent small scale stories and the book captures them well. The use of maps is appreciated, although it is helped that the battle was relatively simple compared to the multi-day fights at Chickamauga or Gettysburg.

Richard Buxton says

I'm a huge fan of Peter Cozzens' work and have read the trilogy on the Chattanooga Campaign out of order, reading 'This Terrible Sound' and 'The Shipwreck of their Hopes' before going back to read the first book, 'No Better Place to Die.'

It has the same impeccable and detailed research. Cozzens seems to have the goods on everyone from the army commanders to the privates in the thick of things. The book has his usual wonderful narrative flow and the events leading up to the battle are clearly described while at the same time the key players' characters are

well established.

Unlike the other two in the series, I wanted more maps. Certainly more of the overall position as the battle developed. I also felt we lost the army commanders, Bragg and Rosecrans, for large sections of the battle while we focused more on the brigade and division level. I wanted to know what they were up to.

I'd still hugely recommend this book. Outside of Shelby Foote, no other Civil War writer I know has such an accomplished narrative style and such deep and assured knowledge.

Steven Peterson says

Abraham Lincoln always held a special place for General William Rosecrans because of his victory at the Battle of Murfreesboro (or Stone's River). This was a narrow thing, with the forces of Braxton Bragg coming very close to victory. But the star-crossed Confederate general ended up withdrawing, leaving Rosecrans' Union forces to claim victory by holding the field of battle.

Lincoln's gratitude is understandable, given the disaster at Fredericksburg and Grant's and Sherman's lack of success at Vicksburg. Rosecrans' victory was a rare bright spot at this time.

But how much of a bright spot, really, was it? That is why the story of this battle is important.

This is the story of two armies each planning the same first move in battle--an attack on the other side's right wing. Bragg was lucky to get in the first blow. His forces rolled up much of Rosecrans' right. The stubborn resistance of Sheridan and others slowed the onslaught. By the end of the day, lines were stabilized and Rosecrans had held--but just barely.

Bragg expected the Union forces to withdraw--but they did not. The Union generals met that evening to decide what to do and Rosecrans ultimately made the call to hold his position.

The next day, Bragg ordered a sanguinary attack and it was beaten off with heavy casualties. His withdrawal from the field followed.

This is a straightforward description of the battle. It may not be the best written account of a battle, but it moves the story along nicely and provides ample detail to get a sense of what was happening and what was at stake. All in all, worth reading. . . .

Eric says

This compelling book tells the battle of Stones River, an early battle of the Civil War. My ancestor, John Looper, was involved in the campaign. I try imagine the battle through his eyes as I read.

Joyce Lagow says

Tennessee was a critical state for both sides during the Civil War. There was plenty of Unionist sentiment in East Tennessee, although those who were loyal suffered under a secessionist state government. Lincoln was anxious to aid them, and therefore was always eager to have a Union Army liberate the state, particularly that section. For the Confederates, Tennessee was the doorway to the inner Confederacy; Chattanooga in particular was the jumping off point for the Confederate heartland in Georgia and Alabama. Two armies contested the ownership of Tennessee: The Union Army of the Cumberland, commanded by Major General William S. Rosencrans and the Army of the Tennessee under the questionable leadership of Braxton Bragg. These two armies skirmished a number of times, but in late 1862 and during 1863, the two armies fought 3 major battles that were critical to the war; Stone's River (Murfreesboro), Chickamauga, and Chattanooga. The first at Stone's River took place from December 31, 1862 to January 4, 1863. Nearly a Union disaster, it ended technically and emotionally a Union victory, since Bragg retreated from the field. But despite Bragg's weaknesses as a field commander, it was a close thing. Cozzens' book is well written. He clearly and in great detail describes the personalities of the generals commanding, the events that led up to the battle, command decisions, the enormous problems that Bragg had with his subordinates, especially Polk, and goes into great detail on troop movements. Yet, this is a bad book. Why? The maps. Or, I should say, the lack of maps. Cozzens goes into great detail about the fighting that occurred on December 31, when the Confederates nearly drove the Union Army into the Tennessee River. We read about movements of regiments and detachments of regiments; brigades; divisions. But there is almost no way to follow all this detail, since maps for the time frame between about 9 am and 3 pm are nowhere to be found. Here and there are maps of tiny segments of the battlefield that were bewildering, because it was impossible to relate that area of the battlefield to any other area. Mention is made of fighting occurring, for example, around the Widow Burris house, but trying to locate that house on any of the relevant maps was impossible. For the most part, I was flipping back and forth between a map of the overall area of the battlefield and the position of the two armies on the eve of the battle on pages 74-75 and some of the detail maps, trying to get some idea of where the action occurred. In addition, the detail maps have no distance scale! I've never ever read a Civil War military history in which the maps gave you no idea of the distances involved. For all the reader knows, the units depicted could be 10 miles or 100 ft. apart--there is no way of knowing from the map. Somewhat more minor but still extremely annoying is the way the Order of Battle is presented. For some baffling reason, Cozzens chooses to call them The Opposing Forces instead of the more traditional Order of Battle (OOB). Minor detail, but the presentation is not. The OOB is arranged in the traditional hierarchy: General commanding, then Corps, Corps commander, followed by each division, its head, and the brigades that compose the division and their heads and component regiments. Standard and a valuable part of any military history if the reader wants to have a prayer of keeping the units and their commanders straight; it's the classic case of you can't tell the players without a score card. Unless you have a phenomenal memory, there is no other way to determine whose brigade was doing what when. But the format--the font and font size--are identical for all levels of hierarchy and there is no distance or other demarcation that makes it easy to distinguish division from brigade. I spent too much time trying to locate individual units from the names of their commanders in the truly confusing OOB. I don't feel as if I read this book in vain; I learned a good deal and came away with an appreciation of Rosencrans and even Sheridan, whom I have always viewed as little more than a thug in a uniform. The maps of the latter part of the battle were better and I now feel I have a really good idea of how the Union artillery under Mendenhall shredded the Confederate infantry and saved the Union left. However, I'm going to have to reread the book with a better set of maps from somewhere in order to truly understand what happened in the middle of the New Year's Eve battle. How this book was selected as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection is beyond me. The text is good enough to engage the average reader who

wants to learn a little more detail about what is not the most promoted battle of the Civil War. But without adequate maps, it seems to me that it would only turn the casual reader off reading any more on the Civil War.[return][return]Avoid unless you have a set of good maps from another source. A general map of the battle won't serve.

Daryl Nichols says

Of the many books in my collection on the Civil War, this is still my favorite.

A detailed, easy to follow narrative of the battle. I spent a day on this battlefield and because of this book I was able to completely visualize the battle and where the units and key events were.

The maps are detailed enough that I have build any good wargame scenarios from this book.

Tim says

The first and unquestionably the least in Peter Cozzens' "trilogy" about the Army of the Tennessee, "No Better Place to Die" also is the shortest by far, and enjoyment suffers because of it. This is good, but Cozzens' next two books, centered on Chickamauga and Chattanooga, were much better.

Jeff Bobin says

This was an interesting look at a civil war battle that I knew nothing about. Another case of poor leadership and failing to take advantage of opportunities that would have made a difference in the battle and the war.

I appears to be a fairly balanced look at both armies and what they did well and the many mistakes both side made.

ERIC S BISNOW says

A recurring theme

Foot soldiers and cavalry fought hard.. It was the generals whose ego ran the battles instead of doing there jobs-leading there men. Many battles were lost due generals delays,working against each other and ego.
