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Through the Howling Wilderness: The 1864 Red River Campaign and Union Failure in the West

Gary D. Joiner

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The Red River Campaign of 1864 was a bold attempt to send large Union army and navy forces deep into the interior of Louisiana, seize the Rebel capital of the state, and defeat the Confederate army guarding the region enabling uninhibited access to Texas to the west. Through the Howling Wilderness emphasizes the Confederate defensive measures and the hostile attitudes of commanders toward each other as well as toward their enemies. Gary D. Joiner contends that the campaign was important to both the Union army and navy in the course of the war and afterward, altering the political landscape in the fall presidential elections in 1864. The campaign redirected troops originally assigned to operate in Georgia during the pivotal Atlanta campaign, thus delaying the end of the war by weeks or even months, and it forced the navy to refocus its inland or brown water naval tactics. The Red River Campaign ushered in deep resentment toward the repatriation of the State of Louisiana after the war ended. Profound consequences included legal, political, and sociological issues that surfaced in Congressional hearings as a result of the Union defeat. The efforts of the Confederates to defend northern Louisiana have been largely ignored. Their efforts at building an army and preparations to trap the union naval forces before the campaign began have been all but lost in the literature of the Civil War. Joiner's book will remedy this lack of historical attention. Replete with in-depth coverage on the geography of the region, the Congressional hearings after the Campaign, and the Confederate defenses in the Red River Valley, Through the Howling Wilderness will appeal to Civil War historians and buffs alike.

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