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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ HISTORY

Ozark Blood: Kin and Kind in the Civil War

Fred Berry Jr.
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Ozark Blood focuses on the role of the often ignored border states in the American Civil War—particularly Arkansas and Missouri. Fred Berry, Jr., who holds a master's degree in historical studies, brings research and academic expertise to the project. He also brings family ties and a lifelong familiarity with the Arkansas region. By including details from the lives of his ancestors, Berry provides readers with a firsthand look at life during this tumultuous time. One of his ancestors, Isaac Murphy, served as civilian Special Aide to General Curtis during the early campaigns to drive Federal troops out of Missouri and was later elected as the governor of Arkansas during Reconstruction. Several other members of Berry's lineage were Confederate soldiers killed at the Huntsville Massacre in 1863.

The book quickly asserts that war is never inevitable and points out decisions that moved the country in the direction of war, including President Lincoln's "Proclamation Calling Militia and Convening Congress." "This demand set off reactions within each state of the upper South that resulted in quick attempts to secede," Berry writes. He further describes how everyone in Arkansas during the Civil War experienced the horrors and breakdown of humanity. Gruesome anecdotes support man's inhumanity and reinforce the author's statement that, "Like all wars, no one won."

Using a mix of primary and secondary sources, the author pens a fascinating history of Arkansas's troop involvement and battles. Other interesting facts and statistics are included, such as the fact that "Arkansas, Missouri, Indian Territory, Louisiana, and Texas represented one-third of the total white population of the Confederacy…a fact one might not notice by checking Richmond's attitude toward it." The sections titled "What He Might Say to Us" provide additional insight about individuals.

Typos and spelling issues aggravate, as when "the soul of every man" is written "the sole of every man." A paragraph about the need to keep powder dry consistently misspells the word as "power." But those mistakes and punctuation errors are easily fixed. Battle descriptions are clear and even-handed while also illuminating the strategy and egos behind major decisions. For example, Berry writes, "Van Dorn arrived at the Rebel position. He immediately sent word down the command chain to the effect that he, a professional officer, was now in charge. Very few of the line soldiers were impressed."

The author's insight into the people and territory he calls home offers an informative and entertaining read for Civil War history buffs.

DAWN GOLDSMITH (July 12, 2010)

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