

“To Prepare for Sherman’s Coming: The Battle of Wise’s Forks, March 1865” MAJ (ret) Mark Smith and COL (ret) Wade Sokolosky, Savas Beatie LLC, El Dorado Hills, CA, 2015 270 pages, \$27.95.

In March 1865, the War Between the States had about six weeks left. The Confederate Army was not beaten however. In a series of tactical actions, the understrength and depleted Confederates bloodied the nose of advancing Federal forces. One of those places was at Wise’s Forks, southeast of Goldboro. “To Prepare for Sherman’s Coming: The Battle of Wise’s Forks, March 1865” by MAJ (ret) Mark Smith and COL (ret) Wade Sokolosky is a well-documented and researched study. This is the authors’ second book and an outstanding addition to “No Such Army Since the Days of Julius Caesar: Sherman’s Carolina’s Campaign from Fayetteville to Averasboro”.

Wise’s Forks lies just off the Atlantic and North Carolina Rail Road that runs from New Bern to Goldsboro. Near the town of Kinston, the Confederate army under Braggs made a stand to delay Federal forces moving from the coast to Goldsboro. The rail line was key to Sherman’s advance into the interior of North Carolina. Union control of the rail line would allow Federal logistical support to Sherman’s army. It thus became the focus of a major operation to clear the line to Goldsboro.

The dilemmas faced by Confederate General Johnston in the allocation and positioning of forces is that his armies faced threats from multiple axes. The Union Army corps commander, MajGen Jacob Cox, is thrown into the fight with a “Provisional” army corps. This ad hoc unit of both veteran and untried units is tasked by the Department of North Carolina commander with making junction with Sherman’s Army and facilitating the opening of the rail logistics line to Goldsboro.

With a tie to the problems faced with expeditionary forces and modularity, what happens to the Federal Army demonstrates leadership issues with army units that have not trained together extensively. By dint of heroism and luck, they do not suffer a major defeat at the country crossroads known as Wise’s Forks.

Written by Army veterans and military historians, this story exudes a level of understanding of the intricacies that those who have not worn combat boots do not normally grasp. Illustrated with excellent tactical maps; rare images of participants never before published; and superlative footnotes, this book does much to add to the history of the campaign in the Carolinas. An outstanding bibliography belies the excellent research conducted by the authors.

Smith and Sokolosky have made a readable history that ties tactics, logistics and “face of battle” issues together that both novice and seasoned historians can enjoy. The analysis at the end of the book is outstanding in regards to relating exactly what we teach our military students today about the link between the tactical, operational, and strategic “ends-ways-means

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