

[Fowler on Eichhorn, 'The Civil War Battles of Macon'](#)

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Niels Eichhorn. *The Civil War Battles of Macon.* Civil War Series. Charleston: History Press, 2021. 130 pp. \$21.99 (paper), [ISBN 978-1-4671-4694-4](#); \$32.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-5402-4600-4.



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In late 1864, Union forces pushed deep into Georgia in an effort to break not only the will of the Confederate people but also their ability to wage war. Critical to the success of the rebel forces on the battlefield was the supplies that flowed from the scant industrial centers that the Southern republic maintained. The loss of any of these centers would substantially weaken the Southern cause and bring the already crumbling Confederacy to defeat. Niels Eichhorn's *The Civil War Battles of Macon* is the story of the federal drive to destroy one such center.

Located along both the Macon and Western Railroad and the Ocmulgee River, Macon connected central Georgia to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico via rail and water, which made it strategically situated as a Confederate manufacturing and supply center. Over the course of the war, Macon's various manufacturing concerns (including foundries, powder mills, and ordnance centers) made cannon, muskets, and ammunition. Equally important, its other manufacturing establishments provided blankets, canteens, medicines, tents, matches, buttons, wire, soap, shoes, and numerous other items needed to equip a modern nineteenth-century army. Macon was also the site of Camp Oglethorpe, an officers' prison that held nearly 1,500 men before it closed when federal cavalry threatened it in July 1864. Moreover, the little hamlet became an important hospital and refugee center during the Atlanta Campaign and Sherman's March to the Sea. And it stood second only to Richmond as a Confederate depository, holding 1.5 million dollars in bullion. Finally, it was the site of Confederate munitions laboratories and, had the war continued, would have undoubtedly become the base for even more manufacturing.

Clearly, Macon was an important Confederate city, and its story, while well known to most Civil War scholars, needs a comprehensive study. Eichhorn, the author of two recent books—*Liberty and Slavery: European Separatists, Southern Secession, and the American Civil* (2019) and *Atlantic History in the Nineteenth Century: Migration, Trade, Conflict, and Ideas* (2019)—offers only a cursory glimpse at the important aspects of Macon. The first two chapters cover the founding of Macon and the city's importance to the Confederacy in a scant twenty-two pages. The next four chapters (3-6) cover the Atlanta Campaign, Brigadier General Stoneman's botched raid, Dunlap Farm, the March to the Sea, Walnut Creek, Griswoldville, and Brevet Major General James H. Wilson's raid on the city, all in a mere forty-four pages. The book's final two chapters explore the Asa Holt House and the Civil War memorials located around the city in seventeen pages. There are notes and a bibliography, both of which are quite thin.

In the book's introduction, the author criticizes previous works that cover the Civil War struggle for the town. He states that "previous studies about the battles at Macon have been rather one-sided. Despite using the vast trove of U.S. military documents, the narratives are usually slanted toward the Rebel defenders of the city. For example, works like William H. Bragg's *Griswoldville* (Mercer University Press, 2009) and Richard W. Iobst's *Civil War Macon* (Mercer University Press, 1999) presented a decidedly pro-Confederate view of the events on the battlefield. Moreover, their works are weak on military and battlefield tactical details. This study will go into greater detail of what took place on the battlefield and try to paint a vivid picture of the unfolding battles" (p. 15).

A controversy surfaced online concerning an earlier review of this book, in which a reviewer for the *Emerging Civil War* blog took exception to Eichhorn's perceived anti-Confederate verbiage. The resulting blog posts and small Twitter storm did little for civility and brought out accusations of neo-Confederate bias on the part of the reviewer. It was in reality much ado about nothing. While it is clear from reading the book that the author has no sympathy for the Confederacy or its people, this is not unique in the twenty-first century. What would be unique, if not troubling, to the overwhelming majority of those in the history profession is an author or a book that was sympathetic to the Confederacy or its citizens. Balanced examinations of the Union and Confederacy can only be found in Civil War military history, where examinations of military skill and action can often but not always be separated from Southern political philosophy, racial ideology, and pro-slavery sentiment.

What is surprising and concerning is not the author's anti-Confederate sentiment but his dismissal of other scholars' works because of his perception of Confederate sympathy in their books. His denunciation of Bragg's *Griswoldville* and Iobst's *Civil War Macon* as "decidedly pro-Confederate" is both inaccurate and unhelpful (p. 15). Bias is an intrinsic part of historical research and writing. No historian has ever been nor ever will be completely unbiased. Moreover, until fairly recently, historically speaking, scholars of the Civil War tended to be more nuanced in their approach to exploring the Confederacy without reviewers accusing them of supporting treason and/or racism. Scholars such as Bragg and Iobst belong to that group, as do virtually all Civil War historians writing prior to the early 2000s.

Equally puzzling are some basic works missing from the bibliography.[1] Normally, such books and articles missing from what is obviously an introductory work would not be an issue. In fact, most deal with the socioeconomic aspects of Macon's Civil War experience. However, the author and the History Press declare this work to bring together the first "comprehensive analysis" of the battles in Middle Georgia (book cover). This is truly not the case. Granted, the author does discuss all the engagements, something that has not been done before, but he does not do so in any real depth. While he promises a detailed look at the strategy and tactics involved in the military actions around Macon, the battles covered are given only a basic overview. A reader looking for a blow-by-blow account would be better served with a deeper reading of the *Official Records* or with Bragg's and Iobst's works. Taken together, these two volumes offer the reader a more in-depth understanding of the engagements around Macon.

In sum, while this volume is useful for the casual reader who wants information about Macon during the Civil War and about the historical markers and sites in and around the town, it is not a detailed analysis of the importance of Macon as a strategic supply center, nor is it a comprehensive examination of the battles around the city. In short, it is best viewed as an extended guidebook for

Civil War Macon and its environs. In that capacity, it can and does serve well.

Note

[1]. For example, among the relevant books, dissertations, and articles not found are the following: Robert Scott Davis, "A Cotton Kingdom Retooled for War: The Macon Arsenal and the Confederate Ordnance Establishment," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (2007): 266-91; Dean T. Thomas, *Confederate Arsenals, Laboratories, and Ordnance Depots*, 3 vols. (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 2014); Morton R. McInvale, "That Thing of Infamy: Macon's Camp Oglethorpe during the Civil War," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 63 (Summer 1979): 279-91; James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid through Alabama and Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976); Charles W. Ramsdell, *Behind the Lines in the Southern Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944); William Harris Bragg, *Joe Brown's Pets: The Georgia Militia, 1861-1865* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004); Ida Young, Julius Gholson, and Clara Nell Hargrove, *History of Macon Georgia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1950); Gary Livingston, *Fields of Gray: The Battle of Griswoldville* (Cooperstown, NY: Caisson Press, 1996); Morton Ray McInvale, "Macon, Georgia: The War Years, 1861-1865" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1973); Frank E. Vandiver, *Ploughshares into Swords: Josiah Gorgas and Confederate Ordnance* (Austin: Texas A&M University Press, 1954); Clarence I. Mohr, *On the Threshold of Freedom: Masters and Slaves in Civil War Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); and Maurice Melton, "Major Military Industries of the Confederate Government" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1978).

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