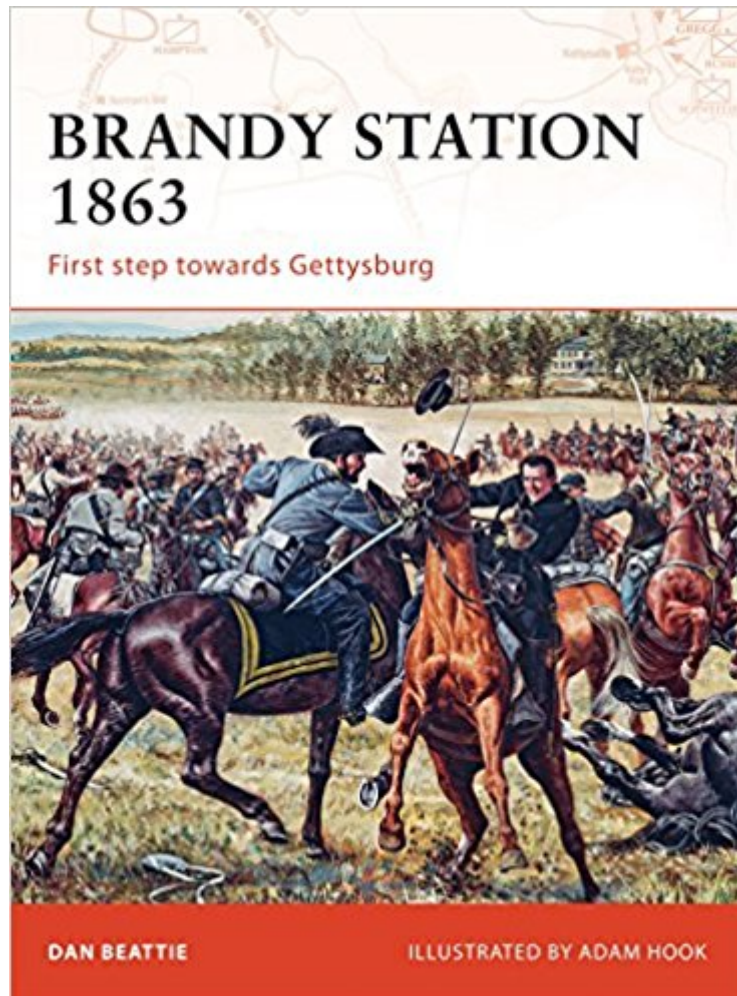




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Brandy Station 1863: First Step Towards Gettysburg (Campaign)



Synopsis

The road to Gettysburg began at Brandy Station on June 9, 1863 during the American Civil War (1861-1865). However, the cavalry clash in Culpeper County, Virginia, counts for more than just the opening round of Lee's second invasion of the North. The battle showed both sides that the Federal cavalry had now come of age, that Blue and Gray horsemen were now equal in ability. Early in the morning on June 9, Pleasanton launched his men, split into two divisions, across the Rappahannock at Beverley's Ford to the north of Brandy Station and Kelly's Ford to the south. Stuart was caught completely unaware by these maneuvers and his lines and headquarters were nearly overrun until reinforcements helped to stabilize the situation. Following 12 hours of bitter fighting the Union forces withdrew back across the river, having matched the Confederate cavalry in skill and determination for the first time in the War between the States in what was the largest and most hotly contested clash of sabers in this long and bloody war. This book describes the battle with a step-by-step analysis of the proceedings, illustrated with detailed maps, birds-eye-views and full color battlescene artwork.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Osprey volume #201 of the Campaign Series is entitled Brandy Station 1863: First step towards Gettysburg. The author is Dr. Daniel Beattie, long considered one of the experts in this fight, and the man who wrote the text for many of the wayside markers around the battlefield. Lavishly illustrated

with color photographs of the modern battlefield taken by Dan and his wife, as well as Adam Hook's usual excellent drawings and sketches, this is one of the best treatises on Brandy Station you will find. At 96 pages, it cannot possibly fulfill the needs of researchers or readers wanting very detailed accounts of the fight and the events leading up to it, but Beattie draws upon his years of study to develop a thorough overview that lacks nothing in terms of giving the reader a solid understanding of what transpired and why. This should become the first book you recommend to friends who want an overview of the largest cavalry battle of the Civil War. Chapter 1 covers the Opposing Plans -- a brief look at why the summer operations became an invasion and what Lee was trying to accomplish. Likewise, Beattie introduces the Federal War Department's goals and objectives. The next chapter examines the Opposing Commanders, particularly J.E.B. Stuart and Al Pleasanton, as well as their superiors - Lee and Hooker. Beattie is objective, fair, and accurate in his assessment of the officers, paying attention to the conditions that led to the critical decisions of the Gettysburg Campaign. In Chapter 3, Beattie dives into the Battle of Brandy Station and gives a very concise, but well written and highly readable account of the multiple actions and maneuvers that comprised the day-long fight. Beattie does not leave the reader hanging with the conclusion of the fight at Brandy Station.

Although the Battle of Brandy Station on 9 July 1863 is but little-known today, Civil War historian Dan Beattie points out in Osprey's Campaign No. 201 on this action, that it was not only the largest cavalry battle of the American Civil War, but the first step on Lee's march toward Gettysburg. Having been involved in preservation efforts on the battlefield today, including writing the historical markers there, Dan Beattie was the perfect choice to write this volume and his love for and knowledge of the subject breath a great deal of life into this narrative. This volume is far better researched than many other contemporary Civil War volumes and offers a valuable look both at the strengths and weaknesses of Union and Confederate cavalry at this crucial mid-point of the war, as well as providing insight into how cavalry reconnaissance (or lack of) shaped the coming Gettysburg Campaign. Overall, a very good, well-written volume in the Campaign series. In the introduction, the author points out that the much-maligned (for his defeat at Chancellorsville) Major General Joseph Hooker actually accomplished two important reforms in the Union Army of the Potomac that would contribute to its eventual victory: he concentrated his heretofore diverse cavalry brigades into a powerful cavalry corps that could match the Confederate cavalry under Jeb Stuart and he formed an intelligence section (the BMI) that could collate and analyze information brought in from multiple sources. In contrast, he points out that the Confederate cavalry - which had held a decisive edge

over Union cavalry since the beginning of the war - were more "numerous, confident and prepared" than ever before, but the Confederacy was becoming less and less able to replace losses.

I was not familiar with this battle before reading this book by Dan Beattie and I must say that it was a very pleasant voyage of discovery. This book is written in a pleasant and interesting manner, the lecture is easy and the events are well and logically explained - and in the same time it is clear that author is quite erudit on this topic. The interest of Brandy Station battle lays not only in the fact that it was the biggest cavalry clash during American Civil War, but also in the fatal flaws displayed on both sides. Author explains very well that before summer 1863 Union cavalry acquired a significant inferiority complex, when the Confederate cavalry went to consider itself invincible. That had consequences for both sides during this battle. First, an overconfident J.E.B. Stuart was caught "with his pants down" by Union general Alfred Pleasonton and his forces were surprised when dispersed and vulnerable. But then the excessive caution displayed during the battle by Union commanders made them waste this golden opportunity and allowed Stuart to recover. Ultimately the battle ended with a Southern victory, although this was a victory dearly paid - and both Stuart and Pleasonton profoundly "edited" the truth about what really happened at Brandy Station this 9 June 1863... The book is quite rich in white and black photos and maps are also very well done. There are three colour plates by Adam Hook, and they are quite honest, but surprisingly only the first shows any actual fighting (and also a display of Confederate military underwear, as the Southerners were surprised at dawn...). The only fighting illustrations are small reproductions of gorgeous plates by Don Troiani.

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