

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Doc W. F. Carver, Spirit Gun of the West.* By Raymond W. Thorp. (The Arthur H. Clark Co., Glendale, California, 1957. Pp. 261. \$8.50.)

Without doubt, William F. Carver (1840-1927) was the greatest marksman the world has ever produced. General Phil Sheridan said of him: "No man will ever live who can beat that shooting!" And General Sheridan was right. Feats of marksmanship were accomplished by this unassuming, somewhat quiet and almost modest man that appear incredible. Except that they are all recorded for us as cold facts of history, his accomplishments today would be passed off as fiction or as the product of a too eager press agent.

Born in Illinois, Doc (a nickname he carried throughout his life) Carver heeded the call of the West when seventeen years of age. Thereafter his first few years were spent with Indian tribes in the Minnesota region, where his phenomenal accuracy with firearms earned him the sobriquet of "Spirit Gun" and "Evil Spirit." After years on the Plains, hunting and roaming, shooting buffalo under contract (he would never accept employment except upon stipulation that the meat and hide both be used—he detested "hide hunters"), by 1877 he was ready to exhibit his rare ability to the world.

The years that followed were crowded with challenges, contests, exhibitions and feats of endurance with firearms unknown before or since. Typical was the fantastic shooting in 500 minutes of 5,500 glass balls thrown into the air. Even to someone unfamiliar with firearms, such would obviously require super-human ability. Merely to lift a Winchester rifle to one's shoulder 5,500 times and lower it again unfired in that allotted time would be beyond the endurance of the average marksman, let alone trying to fire accurately the weapon each time.

A world tour brought Doc Carver before princes, kings and emperors. All were captivated by his mild, almost bashful, and always polite conduct. His command performances before the Prince of Wales, the German Kaiser, and dozens of other royalty and nobility earned him world acclaim. While a guest of the Prince of Wales—later King Edward VII—he shot a hole through three different three penny bits—smaller than a dime—thrown into the air. In Berlin he was the guest of Kaiser Wilhelm I, who honored him with the epithet "Der Schuetzen Konig."

The vagaries of history have been unkind to Carver, and he is entitled to a much firmer niche than he now enjoys. Contemporary circumstance of course placed him with Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody. Measured aside either of them, Carver stands as a much finer and greater person; and author Thorp is to be commended for re-aligning each in a more realistic perspective. In truth, we today know Buffalo Bill more from the writings of his publicity agents, Buntline and Burke, than from the actual deeds of their client.

Carver was the originator of the western show and coined the phrase "Wild West." Again he has suffered at history's caprice, as even today schoolboys assume such to have been the exclusive domain of Cody and Hitchock. The author clears up that point in fine style, and his chapter "The Great Wild West Imbroglia" is priceless reading. This chapter demonstrates that the telling of history may be pungent, as well as funny and delightful. That portion of the volume dealing with the ups and downs of the Wild West Show business is exceptionally well written. Such incidents as when Bowery urchins lined up all available cigar store Indians in front of the hotel where Carver had his Indians quartered, hoping for an unscheduled intra-mural fight; or when a lady of fashion, while feeding carrots to a buffalo cow, found that the animal so liked the menu that her tongue pulled off and the creature swallowed not only the lady's glove but a \$300 diamond ring, add much spice to the story.

The narrative closes with Carver's retirement from the field of championship shooting. The remaining thirty years of his great career are touched but lightly. The book is excellent in every way, and serves history exceedingly well in the re-orienting of us on the relative merits of Doc Carver, Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody.

—George H. Shirk

*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

*Rifles for Watie.* By Harold Keith. (Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1957. Pp. xiii, 332. \$3.75.)

So little is known of the part that the Indian Territory and the Five Civilized tribes played in the Civil War that a real contribution is made by Harold Keith in *Rifles for Watie*. Extended research in libraries, supplemented by many interviews, gave him needed facts and interpretative viewpoints.

Most of the four years are concerned with Eastern Indian Territory, especially the Cherokee and Choctaw Nations. Stand Watie, leader of the Ridge faction against the Ross followers, rose to the rank of brigadier general in the Confederate army,

the only Indian to attain that rank. Disastrous ravages by both armies and the strife that separated friends and relatives pervade much of the story.

The main character, Jefferson Davis Bussey, is met first as a Kansas boy of sixteen, eager to enlist in the Union army. Nearness to the state line made his family the victims of raiding Missouri Bushwhackers. This experience and the effects of hearing Abraham Lincoln speak enabled him to get parents' consent to enlist. Unable to provide a mount, the Bushwhackers having taken the Bussey horse, he could not realize his dream of being a cavalryman.

Numerous experiences gave him insight into the motives and hatreds, the extreme hardships and sacrifices of those who defended the Confederate cause. Historical and geographical facts and phases are faithfully observed. Though most of the characters are fictitious, they portray the life and characteristics of white people, Indians, and Negroes of that time and region.

Early in Jeff's army career he had unfortunate contacts with some incompetent and undependable officers, especially a captain who persecuted him severely. Later the young private was able to expose this captain as the traitor who was selling repeating rifles to Watie.

This study in history is made even more interesting by the romance that runs through several chapters. Jeff's occasional meetings with Lucy Washborne, a Cherokee girl who kept reminding him that she was a staunch "rebel," helped both of them to understand better the sincere loyalties of civilians and fighters on both sides.

Jeff loved dogs and three of them played important roles. Sully, a bloodhound, overtook him on his perilous 125-mile flight from Boggy Depot to Fort Gibson. Sent as a Union Scout across the line, he was captured but managed to conceal his identity and enlist in Watie's cavalry. Recovering from a long spell of malaria and having secured the information he was assigned to get, and more, he made his way, months late, to the Union headquarters.

Much research and years of living near this area enables the writer to present conditions as they were, to portray people as they lived and fought, and to have them live and talk in their colorful ways and dialects. These characteristics do much to make the book interesting as well as informative. The style lends itself well to historical fiction.

—Frank A. Balyeat

*The University of Oklahoma*  
*Norman, Oklahoma*

*Drama On The Rappahannock: The Fredericksburg Campaign.*  
By Edward J. Stackpole. (Military Service Publishing  
Company, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1957. Pp. 297. \$4.75)

One very vocal body of Civil War historians insists that the "suicidal" conflict of a century ago was a "needless" war. War causation, according to this school of thought, cannot be found in basic differences over principle, but on the contrary, resides in the factors of irrationality, abnormality and "artificial" emotions in general.

Though this reviewer is not a promulgator of the above viewpoint, he was struck by the futility of the Fredericksburg campaign as a military operation. Of the over five thousand battles and skirmishes (somebody actually counted them!) fought during the Civil War, the Fredericksburg battle, December 11-15, 1862, seems one of the most inane. At no time during the four year struggle did northern military leadership look worse; Fredericksburg was the nadir. Brooding over the whole operation like an ill omen, was the pathetic figure of Ambrose E. Burnside. Appointed Commander of the Army of the Potomac by Lincoln in a desperate gamble to find a general who could win victories, Burnside proved himself capable of doing everything wrong.

Immediately upon taking command, General Burnside initiated an over-all military plan that was doomed to failure unless his army moved with rapidity; he then made defeat inevitable by dallying for two weeks before crossing the Rappahannock, giving the opportunistic Lee a wonderful chance to form his defense. After the attack began, the Commander of the Army of the Potomac persisted in hurling wave upon wave of his men on a frontal assault of the impregnable Confederate position. This act was typical of his conduct of battle, for after a plan was formed, Burnside's tactical concepts seemed to have been held in a mental "straight-jacket."

Probably his greatest fault was an inability to use the English language. Burnside's orders to his commanders were confused and muddled, necessitating his officers constantly asking for clarification, which was seldom received. General Stackpole notes that even now with all the evidence available, it is impossible for the historians to uncover precisely what was Ambrose Burnside's over-all military plan—assuming there was one.

The only bright spot for the north was the well executed withdrawal under cover of a dark winter night. Caught by surprise, Lee was very chagrined that he had allowed the Union Army to slip away, thereby robbing the Confederates of a strategic victory.

*Drama On The Rappahannock* is recommended to the avid reader of military history who enjoys a detailed minute by minute presentation of a Civil War battle. However, few will be the readers who, after putting the book down, will not ask the question, "What really was the military value of the Fredericksburg campaign?" Perhaps in a larger sense, the thrice-wounded veteran, Oliver Wendell Holmes, caught the significance of the Civil War for the nation when he wrote that his generation had been "set apart by its experience. Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing." One needs only read the daily newspaper to realize how persistent yet are the embers of this fire.

—Gene M. Gressley

*University of Wyoming*  
*Laramie, Wyoming*

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*Oklahoma City: Capital of Soonerland.* By Lucyl Shirk. Clayton Anderson, Editor, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce. (Published under the direction of the Oklahoma City Board of Education, with Semco Color Press, Inc., Oklahoma City, as printer, 1957. Table of Contents. Illustrations. Bibliography. Pp. 252. \$3.95.)

This new book with the catchy title *Capital of Soonerland* will undoubtedly long remain a standard on library shelves, in showing Oklahoma City's place in history from Indian Territory days to 1957. The story here and the wonderful illustrations, many of them fine prints from old photographs dating back to 1889, give the reader the full impact of the growth the Oklahoma's state capital city, in one broad stroke. The illustrations alone—photographs and maps—will satisfy the watcher of television who wants to know more about this home town. Yet the lively text completes the picture of Oklahoma City to-day.

The author, Miss Lucyl Shirk, a teacher of Social Science who was specially commissioned to write and complete a manuscript on the growth of Oklahoma City, achieved a remarkable piece of work on her subject. The text is well organized in twelve sections: "1. Historical Flashback" even goes into the history of Indian ownership of the land that is now Oklahoma City; "2. People Make the City" . . . on through "7. Fun for Everyone," "8. Cultural Interests" and last "12. Oklahoma City Looks to the Future" with its "Fantastic? Impossible? Ridiculous? Well, Perhaps" historical record

as well as ideas that have been promoted by the Chamber of Commerce under the slogan of "600,000 by 1960."

As a project originally promoted by the Oklahoma City Board of Education, the book was planned to offer facts and amusing stories between two hard covers that anyone might like to know about this City, from those who are to be convinced of its right to a "place in the sun" among American cities; to the school children who can view here the marvelous metropolis in which they live.

This book with its up to the minute information in Oklahoma City's development and growth should be in every home and public library.

—Muriel H. Wright

*Oklahoma City*

*Oklahoma: Semi-centennial of Statehood, 1907-1957*). Washington, U. S. Government Printing Office, 1957). Pp. 70. 55¢.

In recent years significant or memorable anniversaries in the histories of the states of the Union have been recognized by a noteworthy exhibition in the halls of the Library of Congress. The display consists of original manuscripts, maps, photographs from the collections in the Library and of the original autograph reports and statutory documents borrowed from the National Archives. The Library presented on November 13, 1957, an exhibition commemorating the Semi-centennial of Oklahoma Statehood. The exhibits included 219 separate maps, photographs and original documents. Now collected into book form, the 19th in a series, with accompanying text and an outline sketch of Indian Territory and Oklahoma history, the catalog of the exhibition is a worthwhile addition to an Oklahoma library. Touching on such widely separated items as Washington Irving's 1832 *Tour on the Prairies* and Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!", the entire panorama of Oklahoma history has been artfully collected and displayed. Information is included on how copies of each picture and other entry in the exhibition may be ordered from the Library of Congress. The booklet is more than a souvenir of the Oklahoma Semi-centennial.

—George H. Shirk

*Oklahoma City*