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Review of *General James G. Blunt: Tarnished Glory* By Robert Collins

William Garrett Piston
Missouri State University

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General James G. Blunt: Tarnished Glory. By Robert Collins. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2005. 239 pp. Maps, photographs, bibliography, index. \$23.00.

James G. Blunt's name is obscure except among those who specialize in the Trans-Mississippi theater of the Civil War. In that neglected region he was a major personage in both political and military affairs. A native of Maine, an abolitionist, and a Republican, he moved to the Kansas Territory in

1856 and was an active player in the Free State cause. He became one of the most important supporters of Free State politician James H. Lane, and to a significant degree his fortunes rose or fell with those of the "Grim Chieftain." Partly due to Lane's wartime patronage, Blunt served as a colonel, brigadier general, and major general (the only one appointed from Kansas). During the war he held a number of important departmental commands. While other Union commanders stalled, complaining of limited resources, Blunt moved. He was a key figure in assisting Native Americans who favored the Union and suppressing those who sided with the Confederacy. Nearly killed by guerrillas at Baxter Springs, he fought with credit in the Prairie Grove and Westport campaigns. Blunt's actions were often controversial, and he was repeatedly accused of corruption. Insubordinate, bombastic, and contentious, he was a thorn in the side of his superiors, but a hero of the first order to many Kansans. His fortunes after the war were mixed, and he died, insane, in 1881.

Robert Collins's biography of Blunt possesses both strengths and weaknesses. Collins is a freelance writer publishing with a commercial press, and his work falls far short of the standards set by historians. He eschews footnotes, borrowing heavily from historians without acknowledgment save a listing in his bibliography. He omits important recent scholarship and uses almost no primary sources. He does, however, make excellent use of contemporary newspapers. Collins's strength is his balanced and judicious presentation of Blunt. He restores his subject to a rightful place near center stage, but never claims too much for him. He details Blunt's accomplishments while fully acknowledging his faults. While examining Blunt's life, Collins provides the reader with a first-rate discussion of the tortuously complex interrelationship between political and military affairs in Kansas. He argues convincingly that Blunt was a competent commander whose drive and energy contributed greatly to Union victory. He also demonstrates that Blunt's egotism sparked personal feuds that undercut his accomplishments. While not a definitive work, Collins's biography of Blunt merits a place on the bookshelf of those who want to understand the history of Kansas and the Civil War west of the Mississippi.

WILLIAM GARRETT PISTON
Department of History
Missouri State University