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Review of *Palmito Ranch: From Civil War Battlefield to National Historic Landmark* by Jody Edward Ginn and William Alexander McWhorter

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As any Civil War buff knows, the Battle of Palmito Ranch—fought twenty miles east of Brownsville, Texas, in May 1865—was the last land battle of the conflict and, ironically, a victory for the Confederacy. Only a few hundred men participated on each side, and since the battle held no strategic importance, it quickly faded from memory except as an answer in trivia games. A few twentieth-century efforts to memorialize the site by erecting markers failed to raise the battle's profile. That changed in 2007, when an "alliance of regional and national partners" began working to memorialize and interpret the site properly (45).

The first portion of the book offers excellent accounts of the "First" and "Second" Battles of Palmito Ranch in September 1864 and May 1865, respectively. The first was a rambling, low-key affair that may

not have been considered a "battle" so much as a series of skirmishes and firefights spread out over several days. The second battle was more clearly fought as a single engagement. Although the battle obviously did not affect the outcome of the war, it is interesting in the unusually diverse makeup of the men who fought there. Hispanics fought on both sides, while a detachment of United States Colored Troops and a Union cavalry regiment consisting of Texas Unionists also participated. In fact, it may have been the most racially "integrated" battle fought in the entire war. The descriptions of the battles themselves are detailed and clear. Yet the maps of the battlefield, as they appear in the book, are not particularly useful to understanding the fight itself; they are taken from interpretive markers at the battle site and are of too large a scale and too little detail to obtain a sense of troop movements.

The second part of the book provides extensive detail on the process of creating and interpreting the battlefield as a National Historic Landmark, and the development of historic markers, a viewing platform, and interpretive audio transmitted via radio. Unlike most Civil War sites, and in spite of the explosion of population in the immediate vicinity, most of the battlefield remained undeveloped, mainly because much of it occupied a United States Fish and Wildlife refuge. The authors stress the hard work of individuals and organizations large and small. "The core ingredient that has helped save Palmito Ranch," they write, was the "growing coalition of stakeholders" that "lent their special talents and resources to the historic preservation of the battlefield" (65). The detail about how exactly a historic site is recognized and interpreted will be inherently interesting to public historians and to Civil War enthusiasts; it does get a little too detailed at times for other readers. The authors spend entirely too much time on an archeological effort conducted largely with metal detectors that turned up no relevant artifacts.

The preservation and advocacy elements of the book take precedence over the events themselves, which tends to exaggerate the importance of the site to Civil War history. As such, *Palmito Ranch* will be of interest to those seeking a clear, detailed case study of the complex interactions between historians (particularly local and amateur historians), county/state/federal governments, granting agencies, and private fundraisers that are necessary to create, interpret, and maintain a historic site.