



The Spirit of the Border

Zane Grey

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He was known as Deathwind to the Ohio Valley Indians, and now Lewis Wetzel must single-handedly save Fort Henry. Armed only with his long rifle and knife, he heads out on a one-man rampage to stop the bloody border wars, to face down Chief Wingenund and to avenge the brutal missionary massacre at Village of Peace.

The Spirit of the Border Details

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From Reader Review The Spirit of the Border for online ebook

Peg Lotvin says

After visiting Zane Grey's home in PA, I have picked up several of his novels. So far, I find that I have read every one of them before. Guess that means they are enjoyable at the time, but in the end, easy to forget.

Joleen says

This is another book by Zane Grey based on past relatives of his from the 1700s. They were the Zane family, some of who lived at Fort Henry, some of which enjoyed being out in the wild, and some who kill Indians. There had been a peaceful treaty recently, but there are still Indians encouraged by renegade white men to fight against peaceful white people including a missionary village.

Kidnapping and brutality are subjects in the book. One man in particular (Jim Gurty) was an extremely evil white renegade/turned Indian, who would kidnap women use them and beat them. Many people feared him, many people wanted him dead because of his brutality. Lew Wetzel was the famous Indian hunter who set out to help a number of people who worked with the missionaries, who had been abducted by Jim Gurty. The Saga that followed all of this was amazing. Once again the language was old-fashioned and not as easy flowing as today's language. A couple of incidents were pretty graphically violent, nothing I particularly wanted to read as I'm going to sleep. Sigh!

There was a horrible incident that happened in the church of the missionary compound, and to some degree it's the truth. These missionary compounds are in history books, but the incident where the Christian Indians were murdered was slightly different. In reality the Christian Indians were sent to find food and bring it back to the place where they were forced to move. Marauders and the US Army came across the Indiana fetching food from their former compound, and decided to kill them because they didn't trust them. Very sad. I read the historic account.

Anyway good book if you can get past the dialog.

Susan Reed says

Very fun story with good characters and action.

Did not realize that this was #2 in the series. Now I'll have to go back and read #1.

Mark says

This was an intense book about native Americans becoming Christians and then being slain by their own people who were led by white renegades who hated Christianity. As always, Grey's writing is superb, classical, and precise. I only subtracted one star because the book didn't end like I wanted.

Jacob says

This is a tale set sometime after the Revolutionary War in the late 18th century. It involves frontiersmen,

missionaries, and natives, all clashing on the border between European settlers and American Indians. The viewpoints are perhaps somewhat stereotypical, and the characters lacking some dimension, but it was a believable read, with not all the "good guys" surviving nor all the "bad guys" getting their just reward. Only the second Zane Grey novel I've read. Like the first, it kept me engaged but was not riveting. A solid work. 3 stars.

Kenneth Grossman says

?

Spirit of the Border (1906) by Zane Grey (1872-1939) is a historical novel about the American frontier during the American War of Independence (1775 - 1783). At this time, the United States' frontier began at Fort Pitt (present-day Pittsburgh), and the Ohio River was a main artery to penetrate the thickly-forested, unsettled and dangerous west country. The region west of Fort Pitt was inhabited by Indians (mainly of the Delaware, Shawnee and Huron nations), who were being incited by the Detroit-based British against the rebellious American colonists. The action takes place around Fort Henry (Wheeling, West Virginia), an American outpost, and further west at the Moravian Monastery site (an actual place that is now a tourist site), where at that time there was an ongoing, somewhat successful effort to convert American Indians to Christianity. The region in the vicinity of the Moravian Mission was in fact contested by the British (supported by loyalists and Indians) and the rebellious American colonies and some Indians. Thus, anyone living in this grey region between the British and the colonists (including the missionaries) was suspect and therefore vulnerable; woe to those caught in-between.

At that time, the Indians were the major force in the region (though divided among themselves and manipulated by the whites). To appreciate how powerful the Indian nations were, one should recall that the greatest defeat of an American army by the Indians was not that of Custer in 1873, but occurred about ten years after the events in this book in 1791. At the Battle of the Wabash River (St. Clair's Defeat), an army of Indians inflicted about 1,000 casualties on the American army, killing about 650 (only 24 escaped unharmed). A hundred years earlier, Indians on the warpath in Virginia killed several thousand colonists. In between these large battles, thousands died on both sides. For many white men on the frontier, who had seen friends and relatives killed by Indians, distinctions between Indian friendlies and hostiles became blurred. Passions ran high, and this was a contributing cause of the Moravian Mission massacre.

The story begins with Joe Downs going west from Virginia to the border country. He is soon caught up in the zest, beauty and, yes, violence and danger of his new life. He is joined by his identical brother Jim (a dedicated preacher), who has also come west, together with two sisters of another preacher, as members of the proselytizing Moravian Mission. But this book has no happy end. All the protagonists experience the terror of the border country -- Joe and his Indian wife are killed by a renegade white man; one of the sisters is raped and dies. Jim is almost killed and the other sister almost raped.

The story's climax is the Moravian Mission massacre of several dozen defenseless Christian Indians (an actual event that occurred in 1783), who are herded into a few buildings and slaughtered (the actual figure was 96) and the buildings burned to the ground. Jim survives and marries the other sister, who barely escaped unharmed from a renegade white man. The couple chooses to continue living on the frontier but to lead a little less dangerous life at Fort Henry. This is the optimistic note at the end of the story.

Zane Grey writes about a region with which he is intimately familiar. He is a direct descendant of some of the people mentioned in the book, who founded settlements in the area that exist today. He tells us in an introduction that he even utilized a diary of one of his ancestors. As such, one can feel that this book, though fiction, is a labor of love. Almost all the personalities, even the main Indians, are actual historical

personalities, as are all the white men mentioned by name.

It is unclear to me how much Zane Gray knew about the Moravian Mission massacre when he wrote this book, but the facts today, 110 years after publication of his book, seem rather different. The militia commander, Captain Williamson, had with him at the Moravian Mission 150 men not 80. Williamson did not, however, stand aside (as Zane Grey tells us) as Christian Indians were massacred by hostile Indians and renegade whites, the Girty brothers. On the contrary, Captain Williamson and his soldiers were the ones that committed the massacre of the Christian Indians (some soldiers refused to participate). Furthermore, the arch fiend in Grey's story, the renegade white man Jim Girty, was not killed as in the story, but rather appears to have later crossed the border with his brother into Canada (they were loyalists) and died there about 1820. The Girty's, it turns out, were prolific, and their descendants have made a concerted effort to rehabilitate their good name.

This book is a good read for those who enjoy the Western genre (as I do) and have some historical context regarding the events and personalities described (you can consult Wikipedia). A down side is that the characters tend to be idealized -- the good guys are good-natured, brave and beautiful; the bad guys are evil, cowards and ugly (well, at least, we don't have any trouble telling them apart). On the positive side, Zane Grey does make distinctions between the positions of the main Indian leaders as well as between the various white men, both good and bad. The attitudes of the Indians are rationalized and explained. Zane Grey writes without prejudice; whites marry Indians without any stigma. He even distinguishes between the personalities of Jim and Simon Girty.

Zane Grey is best when he describes the secrets of tracking and hunting and the pristine and natural beauty of the unsettled (by whites) forests. There is a brilliant episode where Lew Wetzel, the most skilled of the white frontiersmen, tracks Chief Wingenung through the forest with intent to kill him (both were real people). We have the following description:

"What was there? A twisted bit of fern, with the drops of dew brushed off. Bending beside the fern, Wetzel examined the grass; it was not crushed. A small plant with triangular leaves of dark green, lay under the fern. Breaking off one of these leaves, he exposed its lower side to the light. The fine, silvery hair of fuzz that grew upon the leaf had been crushed. Wetzel knew that an Indian could tread so softly as not to break the springy grass blades, but the under side of one of these leaves, if a man steps on it, always betrays his passage through the woods. To keen eyes this leaf showed that it had been bruised by a soft moccasin. Wetzel had located the trail, but was still ignorant of its direction. Slowly he traced the shaken ferns and bruised leaves down over the side of the ridge, and at last, near a stone, he found a moccasin-print in the moss."

In the end, Wetzel, after being led in circles, realizes that he has been outwitted. He is at a location where the Indian's footprints lead in two opposite directions!

In conclusion, Zane Gray does indeed capture the spirit of the men and women who went west into that dangerous and unpredictable border area: good people seeking a better life, adventure seekers, unscrupulous men and, yes, even the American Indians who they encountered and resisted them.

Amy says

This is book two of what is called the Ohio River Trilogy, the first being *Betty Zane*. These books are apparently from a journal of Zane Greys grandmother, so reading them one feels the depth of the hardship of "border life" more fervently. Saying that I enjoyed these books would be true, but for the knowledge that many Native Americans were wronged on so many levels. It does offer a descriptive and realistic lens to view this period of settlement in the West. Zane Grey is a prolific descriptive author who evokes the spirit of his characters and the hard realities of pioneer life.

Thom Swennes says

With a spirit and tradition of stories by James Fenimore Cooper and a preamble to the works of Louis LÁmour, *The Spirit of the Border* by Zane Grey fits comfortably between. Grey displays a ready talent in painting a detailed picture of the westward expansion and settlement of new lands by the still young United States. Some of the scenes appear very brutal but brutal were the times. He walks a precarious tightrope over the question of Manifest Destiny and ancient native claims to these new lands, but gives the advantage to neither. Although it isn't among his best works, it is well worth the time and effort to read. You won't be disappointed.

Linda says

This is the second volume in the Ohio River trilogy, which began with *Betty Zane* and culminates with *The Last Trail*. In comparison with ZG's tales of the American West, set in the following century, I would venture the opinion that the Ohio River stories are more bloody and brutal.

John Lietzke says

Review of Spirit of the Border by ,John Lietzke

They story was great. I enjoy stories about frontier life of early Americans of the late 1700s and early 1800s. I did think the author dwelled too long on Christianity.

Kathie says

I would be willing to give this book a 3.5 stars. Since it was written so long ago, there are passages that were acceptable then but not politically correct at this time, especially in reference to the Native American population.

Grey always writes beautiful descriptions. The Ohio territory and the settling of it he describes are particularly harsh. Hatred, killing, abductions, and other cruelties exist throughout. The author seemed well informed about learning to live in the wilderness and tracking game as well as humans. He didn't hesitate to kill off some of the central characters.

I was interested in reading this book because my ancestors, like so many others, settled for a time in Ohio. Through my genealogical searches, I have learned a little about the hardships they faced. Zane Grey's writing

made me even more sympathetic to their struggles.

Stephen Brooke says

Zane Grey had not really hit his stride yet with this early work, an historical fiction novel set in the upper Ohio River valley in Revolutionary War times. 'The Spirit of the Border' tends to be plodding and verbose, with way too much description and 'telling.' Here and there are action scenes that foretell the more masterful style of his later works, the best of his Westerns.

Compared to the historicals set in the same period and general area by his contemporary, Robert Chambers, it definitely suffers. Less focus, less of a cohesive plot, and it's hard to say exactly who the protagonist of this novel is supposed to be. To me, this is a take it or leave it book — not a bad book but not one I would particularly recommend either.

Denny says

When I was a child, I loved spending hours, during the blissful weeks I often spent on my Grandparents' farm, perusing Grandpa's bookshelf and reading through his collection of Zane Grey books.

25+ years later, I hadn't read or even thought much about his old books in years when one day Grandpa, by then suffering the effects of senile dementia and nearing the end of his life, handed me 4 of them and urged me to read them, so I could see what good writing was. I accepted them with pleasure and anticipated a pleasantly nostalgic few days of reading ahead.

Sadly, I was sorely disappointed. What to my childhood sensibilities first read as exciting, heroic, adventurous, and virtuous now seemed to be jingoistic, hackneyed, prejudiced, propagandistic, and poorly written, and I gave up after finishing this book and *The Short Stop*.

Dejected and unwilling to discuss the books with my Grandpa, I waited a few weeks and stealthily, guiltily returned them to his bookshelves, and sought to absolve myself by confessing my actions to my Mom, his daughter.

Maybe Grey's writings are explainable as a product of his times; he certainly was widely read and enjoyed. But I will satisfy myself by remembering the pleasure his books brought me as a child and by recalling the idyllic environment in which I read them rather than by my later reflections on his work. I miss you, Grandpa & Grandma.

S. Daisy says

I finished *The Spirit of the Border* today. It was such a beautiful, sad, yet wonderful story, and I would highly recommend it. It's about two brothers, Jim and Joe, one a Christian missionary trying to convert the Indians, the other a troublemaking Indian hunter. They both love the same girl, and she likes both of them for their own unique personalities. Who will win her heart? I really loved this story, and would consider it one of Zane Grey's best.

John says

This second of Zane Grey's many novels, and his second in the Zane ancestral trilogy, tells of the exploits of Lewis Wetzel, a sworn killer of Native Americans in the last part of the 18th century around the Ohio River Valley. Rather than seeing this novel, as many others have, as being politically inappropriate by today's standards, I found that Grey demonstrated with extreme tact, that good or evil is not within a specific race, but within each person. In fact, some of the most ruthless individuals in this book were white renegades, and some of the most noble characters were Native Americans. In addition, I felt the novel opened a part of American history to me, although romanticized, that has been subtly swept under the rug, due to its potential embarrassments, and controversy. In fact, it makes one wonder if our contemporary history books are altering the past to not arrive at the truth, but to simply make the historical tale more appropriately palatable in order to avoid any prejudicial contention.

In any case, I found the novel captivating, particularly in the way it pulls the reader into the time when settlers were pushing into the borderlands around Ohio, including the courage, the brutality, and even, the terror. The book makes one wonder about the type of individual that would venture into this undiscovered country. In telling this story, Grey develops characters that become endearing or detestable to the reader, and tells of those who encounter violent tragic ends due to the cruelty and primitiveness of the time period and the location. This novel, is not a sunny stroll in the park, but a dark and brooding study of the expansion of the west and the sacrifices and savageness that made it happen. Consequently, few if any, came through this period mentally or physically unscathed, but all were affected. And at the end, we cannot help but be impressed by those who have the resoluteness, courage, and sometimes, even divine help, to survive. And in finishing this, we should count ourselves blessed, if any of those were our ancestors, that we can sit in an easy chair and enjoy their history without personally experiencing the ferocity of the age.
