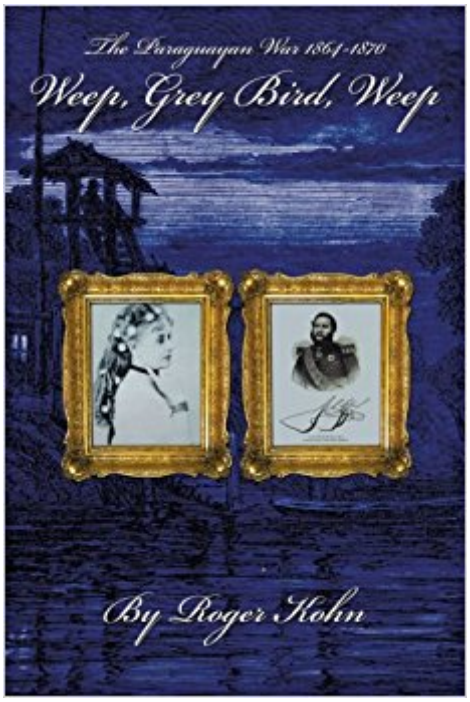
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Weep, Grey Bird, Weep: The Paraguayan War 1864-1870



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Synopsis

Weep, Grey Bird, Weep is the story of the most extraordinary love story of the 19th century, set against the background of the most disastrous war ever fought. The war saw the tiny republic of Paraguay fighting against the combined forces of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. By the time the war ended, in March 1870, Paraguay's population had been reduced by more than half, and 80 per cent of the male population had been killed. Paraguay's leader in this war was Francisco Solano Lopez and by his side was his devoted lover, a girl from Ireland called Eliza Lynch. He was killed on the last day of the war and she buried him and their eldest son, who died trying to protect her, with her bare hands.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Roger Kohn is a retired journalst with a life-long interest in Paraguay. His book is based on intensive research using sources in both English and Spanish.

The good news is that this IS a general history of The War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870) and is NOT a love story between the Paraguayan dictator and his Irish mistress (as described on the outside back cover). The bad news is that this work has some very serious technical failings. Overall, it is the "best" readily available inexpensive work on this war. While Kohn appears to want to replace Charles Kolinski's 1965 work (Independence or Death! The story of the Paraguayan War), Kolinski's work is much better. (Of Kohn's 113 endnotes, he cites Kolinski 14 times.)The serious technical flaws include:1. There are just two tiny maps (pgs. 146 & 339). They appear to be

handwritten. The first is tied to the seige of Humaita. The second shows the post-war territorial annexations by Argentina and Brazil. So once again here is a work that needs maps and lots of them, but the author chooses to short the reader, who struggles to know the location of important places. There is no excuse for this!2. There is no preface, introduction, or author's notes. All we know about the author is what is on the back cover: "Roger Kohn is a retired journalist with a life-long interest in Paraguay."3. For a work of 362 pages, there are a mere 113 endnotes and they are all buried at the very back of the book (on pgs. 369-371). There are no page footnotes or chapter endnotes.4. The table of contents is both a mess and uninformative. First, it fails to mention all of the following: Bibliography, b&w plates/photos, and maps! The contents are merely broken out into 4 parts (1. The Vanished Arcadia, 2. Humaita, 3. The Tiger's Paw, and 4. To Cerro Cora) comprising 36 unlabelled chapters. So sadly, one cannot discern an approximate time period for each part or chapter.5. The Bibliography is an absolute and complete mess! It is immediately obvious that no one proof-read it or even checked to see if it was completed in draft form. I count at least 19 (!) works that are NOT properly cited; the citations are just author and name of work but fail to include publisher, date of publication, or both.- For example, here is one entry: "Baille, Alexander F., A Paraguayan Treasure, (sic)". From my copy of Pendle's extensive bibliography in his work, Paraguay, A Riverside Nation (2nd Ed., 1956), Baille's work's full title is "A Paraguayan Treasure: the search and the Discovery", and its publication history is as follows: London, Simpkin, Marshall, 1887. (Pendle points out this is a work of historical fiction.)- Kohn fails to show the original year of publication of many works. He cites Charles Washburn's important work in a reprinted 1973 edition but fails to show that it was originally published in 1871. Same for Box, where he cites a 1967 reprint but not the original from 1929.- I suspect the dates of publication show for some works are inaccurate. Pendle cites W.H. Kobel's work on Paraguay as 1917 while Kohn cites it as 1916. Pendle cites Dombrowski's historical novel, Land of Women, to 1935 while Kohn cites it as 1932.- At least one imporant work cited five times in the Endnotes is not shown in the Bibliography. In the Endnotes it is just shown as "Raine". I believe this is: Raine, Philip. Paraguay. New Brunswick: Scarecrow Press, 1956. (This citation taken from my copy of Edward Lucas White's El Supremo, 1967 edition, E.P. Dutton (originally published 1916; White's novel is inappropriately cited by Kohn, only by author and title.)- Pendle's important work, Paraguay, A Riverside Nation (first published in 1954, with a 2nd Ed. in 1956, and then a 3rd Ed. in in the 1960s, and a 4th Ed. in the 1970s) is NOT cited in the Bibliography, though his 1959 work on The Lands and Peoples of Paraguay and Uruguay, is in the Bibliography.6. The Endnotes are a complete mess!- Kohn fails to properly cite the specific work used. For example, his Bibliography shows three (3) separate works by Kolinski

(two showing a middle initial of J and one showing K) but all the endnotes say for each of the 14 citations is "Kolinski". No title, no year. So absolutely no way to know which specific work is being cited let alone the page number of the work cited. So there is NO way for the reader to verify a single endnote cited.- Kohn fails to get the author correct. For example, the Bibliography shows Pelham Horton Box's classic work on The Origins of the Paraguayan War, but in the Endnotes, the work is cited as both Box (#10 & #17) or Pelham Box (#24, #33, & #36).7. It is impossible to know the author's familiarity with Spanish or Guarani. Only a few of the works cited in the Endnotes are in Spanish (e.g., Centurion--undated, and Cardozo--the Cardozo entry in the Bibliography is of a later reprint and not of the original publication). Most of the Endnote citations appear to be from works in English, including the contemporaneous historical "classics" written in the 1868-1871 time period.The best thing about this book are the nine (9) b&w drawings or photographs scattered throughout. For example, on p. 324 there is a recent photo of the Paraguayan national monument dedicated to the ships scuttled in 1869 to avoid capture by Allied forces. While the photos is small, you can make out one of the raised ships.So I guess the reader needs to be adequately forewarned that this is very amateur history indeed. If you can find it and afford it, get Kolinski. If not, this is readily available and pretty inexpensive.This is a review of the 1/9/2008 softcover edition.

Let's start with what this book is not. The back cover blurb says it is "...the most extraordinary love story of the 19th century, set against the background of the most disastrous war ever fought." Whoever wrote that clearly never cracked the cover of this book. Madam Lynch makes into the book as she should, but to describe this as a love story is total nonsense.Now, what Weep, Grey Bird, Weep actually is: it is a well researched, engagingly written history of a facinating and important period in South American history that is woefully underrepresented in english-language military writing. Roger Kohn has given us both an excellent history of the military actions of the war and a great deal of the social and political action, at least on the Paraguayan side. He follows the history with a well thought-out, dispassionate analysis of the effect of the war on Paraguay (catastrophic)and of the character of Paraguayan President Lopez (a monster who destroyed his country but was not totally without redeeming qualities - trust me on this one).Two minor quibbles. First, the book would have benefited by more maps. The movements of the various players would be much easier to follow. Second, whoever proofread the galleys did a terrible job. The text is filled with typos and extraneous letters and words.So, ignore the minor nitpicking and read this book. It will provide a gateway to deeper research. Or maybe just give you pleanty to talk about with your military history buff pals.

I thought this was a fascinating story brilliantly told. More so considering that this book absolutely needs a good editor or any editor for that matter. Even in light of how irritating it is to come across such typos and misspellings, the author held my undivided attention from beginning to end. What the Paraguayan people went through (due mainly to absolutely criminally insane leadership) is quite heartbreaking. But, oh boy - considering how stacked the deck was against them - those Paraguayans knew how to fight! A fine and resolute people! A sad and heartbreaking story!

Iron clads and armies of men in kepis die by the tens of thousands by advancing in tight formations in the open against earthworks and trenches that are stubbornly defended. Sounds like the American Civil War, but it is the War of the Triple Alliance that pitted Paraguay against Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Civil War history buffs would find this bloodiest of all Latin American wars just as fascinating. Paraguay's Antonio Lopez foolishly started this war just as the South's Confederacy had against foes that had better resources to win a drawn out and bloody war. Paraguay fought to the bitter end as the nation was put to ruin and most of the young men had died just as the Confederacy had done as well. Roger Kohn has written an excellent history of the war with interesting descriptions of the battles that makes the book a easy and fascinating read. I read the more expensive books on this topic offered by , but found this to be the best written book on the topic of the Paraguayan War. My only complaint would be that there are no maps to follow the progress of the events on. Also, a 15 or 20 page color section of illustrations would make this a much better book, but I still enjoyed it very much.

The author has included an mind-boggling amount of detail; shows that a lot of hard work has gone into theproject and there is a serious effort to describe the events as accurately as possible, but yet with a greatdeal of sensitivity towards characters who might otherwise come across as relentlessly cruel andtyrannical. I learnt more from this book than I would otherwise have known about Paraguay andthe Spanish Empire in South America.

This book is NOT a love story but a fascinating account of the Paraguayan or Triple Alliance war. Paraguay was so ruined by the war it turned it into a third world country.

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