

A View From The Ridge: Rediscovering One Union Regiment's Gettysburg Service

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Review

A VIEW FROM THE RIDGE

Rediscovering one Union regiment's Gettysburg service

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Dreese, Michael A. *The 151st Pennsylvania Volunteers at Gettysburg: Like Ripe Apples in a Storm.* McFarland & Company, ISBN 786408049

For a regimental history to have an impact on historical literature the author must convey the wider range of events surrounding a battle or campaign. Placing a regiment in proper historical context, describing actions of other units involved, and defining the general military situation are essential components to an exemplary regi-mental history. Michl A. Dreese admirably accomplishes this in **The 151st Pennsylvania Volunteers at Gettysburg: Like Ripe Apples in a Storm.**

Dreese's opening chapter is devoted to organizational information. Excerpts from recruits' letters provide insight into why the 151st's men enlisted; they often expressed a desire to preserve the nation and to defend their native state. One officer writes of his fear that if the Union is not preserved then other states might follow the course of secession. The officer and the entire regiment understood the severity of the situation facing them. The author's selection of passages provides a context through which the reader is able to appreciate the regiment's later tenacity.

By the time of Gettysburg, many units on both sides were battle hardened from earlier campaigns. The men of the 151st , in contrast, were not seasoned veterans; while there were some men with prior military experience, the majority entered service with backgrounds in teaching, lumbering, farming, and other skilled trades. Organized in the latter part of 1862, from the counties of Warren, Snyder, Juniata, Schuylkill, Berks, Susquehanna, and Pike, some of the regiment's men may have wondered if they ever would see action. Other regiments in the brigade doubted how they would fight.

In the following chapter, Dreese sets the stage, outlining the Army of the Potomac's pursuit of the Army of Northern Virginia into Pennsylvania. It is described in such a way that the reader can sense the immensity of the impending battle.

The book then flows into Gettysburg's first day. Dreese masterfully recounts the fighting involving the 151st and other regiments in its brigade on McPherson's Ridge (the 151st was part of Biddle's Brigade, 3rd Division, First Corps). Dreese includes accounts of the fighting on McPherson's Ridge from the perspective of the attacking North Carolinians as well, which helps provide a balanced view of the clash.

Key role in Pickett's Charge

The climax of **The 151st Pennsylvania Volunteers at Gettysburg** comes with the climax of the battle, Pickett's Charge. The 151st, positioned to the left of center on Cemetery Ridge, played a key role in the repulse. The author once again does a fine job of telling the story, paying attention to the overall military situation. In the final pages, the reader learns of the horrors experienced by unfortunate men in field hospitals or en route to one of the wretched prisons of the South. Dreese concludes with the postwar lives of the survivors.

Numerous maps and photographs provide a visual aid to the epic struggle. While before Gettysburg the 151st was virtually untried, it proved itself in its native Keystone State. Michl A. Dreese has written the first history of the 151st Pennsylvania Volunteers, providing overdue tribute to a regiment that suffered over 70 percent casualties at Gettysburg. He also has delivered a valuable tool for studying one of the most ferocious battles of the American Civil War.

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