

O'Er Land And Sea: Four-Volume History Of Civil War Leathernecks Now Complete

E. Rory O'Connor

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Review

O'ER LAND AND SEA

Four-volume history of Civil War leathernecks now complete

O'Connor, E. Rory

Spring 2001

Sullivan, David M. *United States Marine Corps in the Civil War: The Final Year*. White Mane Publishing Company, 2000-09-01. ISBN 1572492147

David M. Sullivan's lavishly illustrated series, *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War*, is the first extensive history of the Corps during the 1860s. The author's main purpose is to show that, contrary to popular perceptions, marines fought in almost every area of operation and conducted themselves with honor and professionalism.

Sullivan's initial book, *The First Year*, begins with the raid against John Brown at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Although Col. Robert E. Lee, USA, commanded the action, Marine Lieutenant Isr'l Green's troops engaged Brown's force. The book, after discussing the problems the Corps faced in preparing for the war, then details the Corps's role in the battles of Bull Run, Fort Sumter, Hampton Roads, and Tulifnney Crossroads.

The Second Year delves into other areas, including how marines helped the navy with its blockading operations at sea and on the Mississippi River. It also covers small unit actions, the expansion of the Corps, and the life of enlisted marines. The book's final chapter provides a brief history of the Marine Corps Band and its wartime duties.

Among the events of 1863 chronicled in the third installment are the failed attempt to retake Fort Sumter, the botched foray down Louisiana's Red River, and the marines' role in the capture of the C.S.S. *Alabama* and *Florida*. In addition, *The Third Year* discusses how marines played an instrumental role in putting down the 1863 New York draft riot. Sullivan also tries to make sense of the recruiting debacle caused by Commandant Col. John Harris when he wrongly promised prospective marines a bounty available only to men entering the

volunteer army.

In **The Final Year**, Sullivan's fourth volume, the Corps fights its largest battles. The Battle of Mobile Bay saw marines participate in David Farragut's capture of the last major Confederate port on the Gulf of Mexico. The leathernecks performed their standard naval battle duties: sniping and manning several of the warships' heavy cannons. The only time that marines touched land was to garrison Fort Powell. Because of poor recruiting efforts and Congress's allowance of only 3,000 marines, the Corps never had sufficient troops to take part in most of the war's largest combined operations.

The Second Battle of Fort Fisher featured the largest number of marines to fight on land during the war. Roughly 400 marines joined 1,600 seamen in the assault on the South's most powerful defensive position. Admiral David Porter and the Naval Brigade's commander, Randolph Kidder Breese, botched the land action and blamed the marines for the attack's failure. Sullivan provides a cogent defense that explodes Porter and Breese's assertions that the marines shirked their duty. In fact, the author shows that the troops fought to the best of their ability.

During most of the war the Corps was short of men, and John Harris's tenure did little to increase the size or enhance the prestige of his service. **The Final Year** records Jacob Zeilen's subsequent rise to the position of Commandant, but Sullivan, somewhat unjustly, claims that Zeilen was as ineffective as his predecessor. In June 1864, Zeilen received command of the anemic force-short of men and lacking its former reputation-and could do little to correct the problems. Although Zeilen failed to take dramatic steps to rebuild the Corps, Sullivan does not acknowledge that he did start the process that led to a more respected and effective fighting force.

The book concludes with the marines' role in the search for John Wilkes Booth-a fitting end for a history of the Civil War Corps. David Sullivan spent 25 years researching this untapped topic, and the fruits of his labor, though occasionally flawed, demonstrate the Corps's unheralded contributions-from the raid at Harpers Ferry to the military response after President Abraham Lincoln's assassination-to this dark chapter in American history.

E. Rory O'Connor holds a master's in history from Louisiana State University. His thesis is on the command, recruiting, and manpower problems

faced by the Marine Corps in the Civil War.