

We Might as Well Die Here: The 53rd Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry

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Review

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Myers, Irvin G. *We Might As Well Die Here: The 53rd Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry*. White Mane, \$34.95 ISBN 1572493305

Pennsylvania's patriots

A regimental history from the Army of the Potomac

Author Irvin G. Myers sought to honor his great-grandfather, Sergeant Michl McCall of Company C, 53rd Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry, by researching the history of McCall's regiment and sharing that history with a larger audience. In **We Might As Well Die Here**, Myers renders honor where honor is due, both to his ancestor and the men with whom he served.

From November 7, 1861 through June 30, 1865, the 53rd Pennsylvania suffered 880 casualties, including 200 officers and men killed in action and another 232 lost to disease. As part of the 2nd Army Corps, arguably the best fighting unit in the Army of the Potomac, the regiment saw action in some of the most severe fights in the eastern theater, including Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and many of the engagements in the 1864 Overland Campaign.

Myers makes extensive use of letters and official reports, often allowing the soldiers to tell their own story. Nearly two dozen maps accompany the battle narratives, making the action comprehensible and relatively easy to follow. Myers includes casualty reports for the regiment after many of the engagements, thereby allowing readers to witness the brutal and inexorable effects of the war on the Keystone State soldiers. The complete regimental roster takes up 36 pages of the book, enabling researchers and descendants to look up soldiers quickly.

If there is a minor fault in the book, it is that the narrative reads more like a tribute, rather than an objective unit history. Myers is effusive and at times repetitive in his praise of the soldiers' patriotism, courage, endurance, and

sacrifice. The story of the regiment's charge through the Wheatfield at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863, taken without any extraneous commentary, is enough to earn the admiration of any reader. Of course, it may be argued that, since Myers' great-grandfather was wounded in the Wheatfield and Myers himself served 24 years in the United States Army, he has earned the right to exercise his prerogatives as a writer of military history.

Veterans of the 53rd Pennsylvania gathered at Gettysburg on September 1, 1889 to dedicate their monument near the Wheatfield. One of the regiment's surviving officers, Lieutenant Charles P. Hatch, remembered his comrades in a lengthy oration, much of which is included at different points in Myers' narrative. Hatch told the assembled audience that the veterans could leave the battlefield with the added assurance that the Fifty-Third Pennsylvania, vigilant in its country's cause, will hereafter, even when they may be sleeping the long sleep, still maintain on permanent post, a sentinel,' to represent the Fifty-Third Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteersà

For the thousands of Gettysburg visitors who drive by the regiment's monument every year and wonder about the story of the men behind the stone, this book will answer nearly every question about the 53rd Pennsylvania. While regimental histories both old and new abound in the world of Civil War publishing, **We Might As Well Die Here** deserves attention from those readers with a particular interest in the Army of the Potomac, and who enjoy experiencing the Civil War at the regimental level.

John Deppen earned a Master of Arts in Military Studies with honors in Civil War Studies from American Military University in August 2000. He is the current president of the Susquehanna Civil War Round Table.