

### Field Armies and Fortifications in the Civil War: The Eastern Campaigns, 1861-1864

William S. Gross

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## Review

Gross, William S.

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**Hess, Earl J.** *Field Armies and Fortifications in the Civil War: The Eastern Campaigns, 1861-1864*. University of North Carolina Press, \$45.00, hardcover ISBN 807829315

Effective earthworks

Proper fortifications multiplied force

If you don't know what is meant by 'mamelon' and 'ravelin' then immediately refer to the Glossary of this book before proceeding. It is the best place to start if you are not conversant with the terms of field fortifications. Knowledge of these terms will make reading much more meaningful and enjoyable. Even when, as the author notes, records from the time are not as particular in the use of these terms, you will get a good understanding of what is being conveyed with knowledge of these terms. It is a very good short glossary, only a combat engineer would fault the author for his description of the various saps for not taking to its conclusion and giving us the derivation of Sapper.

Professor Earl J. Hess traces the development of the art of war as practiced by both sides with special emphasis on the use of terrain to provide a force multiplier. How both sides learned and re-learned the lessons of reinforcing terrain to provide levels of survivability for their own forces and deny battle field mobility to their opposition. Experience at West Point and the lessons of the Crimean War provided the groundwork for the American Army's use of field fortification. Not only does Hess discuss the theoretical background for employing field fortification in the scheme of maneuver for both sides in the coming conflict, he does a very good job of showing how practice diverted from theory, as was all too often the case.

With the theoretical foundations well in hand, Hess leads us into the reality of engineer force structure on both sides. He paints a picture of a force too small to accomplish all that could be asked of it. The shortage of basic hand tools,

axes, shovels, and spades, to construct such field fortifications will seem alien to any reader who has experienced the U.S. Army over the past 60 years. This part of the story gives modern soldiers a new respect for some of the issues involved in conducting warfare at the soldier level in the 1860s.

The foundation having been laid, we are given a view of many of the campaigns of the Civil War in the East. This view covers the known and not-so-well-known struggles and the impact of field fortifications on the outcome of each campaign. He describes how some lessons are learned and forgotten.

We also are shown the birth of mine warfare during McClellan's Peninsula Campaign. Hess details the work of Confederate Brig. Gen. James Rains did in improvising the first land mines during the fall of Yorktown to Federal Forces. The level of detail provided in his examination of the topic is further displayed by his examination of slave labor by Confederate forces to supplement the work of forces in the field. Hess covers the use of resources to really give the reader an understanding of the issues involved.

At times the author's emphasis on the failure of one side to maximize the use of field fortifications may be an oversimplification. His discussion of the events at the Bloody Lane during the Sharpsburg Battle notes that properly constructed works would have been much more effective. Examined in the extract this is true, but in the maneuver of forces on the battle field and the commander's desire to retain the initiative, perhaps focusing on terrain reinforcement at this stage would have hindered the scheme. That the battle turned out as it did certainly supports Hess's contention, yet most commanders really wanted to retain as much flexibility as possible.

One other quibble is his description of the work to preserve the Gettysburg Battlefield in Appendix 2. He complains of the work done in the years following 1864 to maintain the battlefield in the appearance at the time of the battle was ill-guided. Here he views the issue through the lens of a historian, overlooking the fact that most of the restoration work was done by the Dept. of the Army so future leaders could learn from events at Gettysburg. A loss to historians was a gain for the nation.

The book is well-written and researched with ample reference material at the end: the above mentioned Glossary, worthwhile Appendixes, Notes and Index. A

solid addition to any serious library on the military aspects of the Civil War, it is a good work for the casual reader and the serious amateur as well.

*William S. Gross is a retired Army Reserve Colonel and Emergency Management Coordinator for the City of Dallas now working in the private sector. A Registered Professional Engineer in the State of Texas he has a wide range of experience in the military, engineering design and construction and in disaster response and recovery. His e-mail address is bgross@airmail.net.*