

The Real Civil War

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Editorial

THE REAL CIVIL WAR

Buman, Nathan

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Growing up as a young boy in Iowa and fascinated with history, I learned the simple version of the American Civil War. Additionally, I learned what I knew from a northern perspective. Not until I read fictional stories: Patricia Beatty's *Turn Homeward Hannalee* (1984) and Harold Keith's *Rifles for Watie* (1957) in the fifth and sixth grade respectively did I begin to question and explore the complexity of the American Civil War. There began my desire to become a historian; my interest in learning more about our past; my aspiration to spread what I discovered with others around me. One of my professors once asked his Civil War history class "what, in your life, would make you rise up and charge through Miller's Cornfield at the Battle of Antietam into a hail of bullets?" That simple question had a tremendous effect on my desire to understand the real motives and human emotion behind historical events. I believe these questions enrich our sense of the past and the sense we possess of ourselves.

In this, the Fall 2009 issue of *Civil War Book Review*, we have an excellent sample of recent works that help us to understand the complexity, ideology, and raw emotion behind the four long years of Civil War. We begin our feature reviews with Earl J. Hess's *In the Trenches at Petersburg* as he seeks to examine the influence of field fortifications on the outcome of the Petersburg Campaign and, ultimately, the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Recently, many prominent scholars have collaborated to examine overarching themes that guide our approach to how we study the Civil War and how contemporary Americans experienced the war. *In the Cause of Liberty*, edited by William J. Cooper, Jr. and John M. McCardell, Jr., contains perspectives from northern whites and southern whites and northern and southern blacks to better understand secession and the war experience. Joan Waugh and Gary W. Gallagher have collected essays in *Wars within a War* that explore the internal tensions that challenged Americans during and after the war, while LeeAnn Whites and Alecia P. Long's *Occupied Women* improves greatly our sense of the experience of women in the war who suffered from entirely unique challenges. Finally, in *Fathers of*

Conscience, Bernie D. Jones explores the issue of mixed-race inheritance that challenged southern whites during the antebellum period.

Richard Slotkin graciously granted *Civil War Book Review* an interview to discuss his most recent work, *No Quarter*, an exciting new look at the issue of race through the lens of the Battle of the Crater.

Leah Wood Jewett has written a wonderful column to complement our look at the real Civil War as contemporary Americans experienced the trials and tribulations of conflict as we head into the holiday season, keeping in mind those families torn apart by previous wars and those separated by conflict today.

I am proud and honored to assume the responsibilities as editor of *Civil War Book Review* and I look forward to sharing the new scholarship, perhaps occasionally reflecting on the old as well. I look forward to working with the folks in Special Collections at Louisiana State University and scholars around the world as we all seek a better understanding of a defining period in American history. I would also like to thank graciously the previous editor, Christopher Childers, whom I have had at my disposal throughout the process of putting together my first issue. I only hope to uphold the strong standard for which he has set the precedent.