The Sharpshooters: A History Of The Ninth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry In The Civil War

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Review

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Longacre, Edward *The Sharpshooters: A History of the Ninth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*. University of Nebraska Press, \$34.95 ISBN 9781612348070

The Ninth New Jersey Remembered

For those inclined to believe that involvement in prominent engagements such as Gettysburg, Antietam/Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Vicksburg, or Chickamauga constituted the only meaningful participation in the American Civil War, the members of the Ninth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry, later Veteran Volunteers, would have begged to differ. Noted for their willingness to engage and capacity to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the “Jersey Muskrats,” as they came to be known, saw service in the Carolinas before heading to Virginia in the last full year of the war. Prominent roles early-on at Roanoke Island and New Bern established a place among the fighting elite in bouts with Confederate defenders of coastal North Carolina in 1862. Yet, duties there could be mundane and frustrating between the exhilarating moments of contact, as men from the command guarded railroads, mounted extended scouting expeditions, or faced the dangers of bushwhackers and roving Confederate units. Deployment in the vicinity of Charleston in 1863, and in the Bermuda Hundred Campaign and at Cold Harbor in 1864 marked the unit’s subsequent wartime service. In all of these cases, whether confronting enemy forces, guerrillas, diseases, or the myriad threats posed by transportation or nature, the command exhibited fortitude, laced with the grumbling that marked the soldier’s greatest prerogative in camp and communications with those at home.

Picking up where two previous regimental historians left off, historian Edward G. Longacre takes a fresh look at the Ninth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry’s role in the American Civil War. Taking his title, *The Sharpshooters*, from the unit’s reputation for proficiency in fire-arms and accuracy in

marksmanship, the author follows the regiment through service that extended from 1862 until mustering out in 1865. Distinctive uniforms and renown for effectiveness in the field were the essential underpinnings for pride among those who served in the command. Although success did not always crown the unit's efforts, as evidenced in Virginia when left exposed on a flank resulted in heavy casualties, the Ninth New Jersey remained an esteemed part of the Union arsenal throughout the conflict.

The soldiers of the Ninth exhibited qualities that featured both positive and negative aspects of their existence in the field. Brave and resourceful under fire, the men often demonstrated that quieter moments in camp and bivouac would be anything but by quarreling or consuming spirituous drink. If earlier regimental historians desired to de-emphasize the darker and more unsavory examples of soldier life to assist the surviving veterans and the families of those who served in avoiding them, the modern examiner was under less constraint to do so. Consequently, the story of the Ninth New Jersey as presented here is more comprehensive and uncompromising than those preceding it. Even so, Longacre's account is an unabashedly admiring one.

The greatest contribution of this work comes in adding or enhancing elements of significance to the Civil War soldier experience for a modern readership. Displaying the attitudes that many of the men held toward the Southern civilians and African Americans they encountered allows for a fuller discussion of these aspects of the war. The members of the regiment largely hailed from conservative Democratic roots, but disdain for "Copperheads" and support for the Union war effort remained incontrovertible, despite concerns among some of the men over President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation when it came to the forefront of public awareness.

Edward Longacre has a lengthy list of studies to his credit. He adds to these a compelling history of a unit called upon to serve largely in less well-known theaters, yet whose performances often had an out-sized effect on the successes achieved for Union arms in those fields. Readers will find much to learn about the dedication of these men from New Jersey and the role they played in helping to bring the war to a successful conclusion.

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George Henry Thomas and William Dorsey Pender.