

## The War for the Common Soldier: How Men Thought, Fought, and Survived in Civil War Armies

Donald C. Elder III

*Eastern New Mexico University*

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their weapons; in particular, he examines the story of William Vermilion of the 36th Iowa Regiment, who purchased a bulletproof vest and wrote a detailed letter to his wife about the experience. Hess points out that Vermilion was concerned about the possibility of death but hid his purchase from the rest of his comrades for fear of being labeled a coward. "The boys here don't know it," Vermilion pointed out, stating that "I consider it my duty to protect myself in every manner possible" (110).

Sarah Jones Weicksel explores the material culture of "refugee relief," examining the African American community of Mitchelville, South Carolina, home of the first self-sustained black community in the United States. Weicksel argues for textual, photographic, and archaeological research at refugee camps to better understand the lived experience of slave refugees during the Civil War. Finally, Peter Carmichael's essay examines the collection of war relics in the aftermath of the Appomattox surrender, pointing out that "the craving for the material objects of war became a preoccupation during the last weeks of the Confederacy's existence, when both sides were grasping for things to help them remember the past as they transitioned to a future without war" (201).

*War Matters* is best suited for students and public historians working at Civil War historic sites throughout the country. For the former—to whom the book is dedicated—this useful volume serves as an effective introduction to the idea that physical objects have just as much to say about the Civil War as does a letter, diary, or official government paper. For the latter, the book's various case studies can serve as a useful guide for analyzing historical artifacts at museums, battlefields, and other historic sites that interpret Civil War history. Ultimately, *War Matters* pushes readers beyond the idea that relics are just "things" collected by Civil War enthusiasts and are instead meaningful artifacts that speak to the history of the American Civil War.

*The War for the Common Soldier: How Men Thought, Fought, and Survived in Civil War Armies*, by Peter S. Carmichael. The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 408 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Donald C. Elder III is professor of history at Eastern New Mexico University. He is the editor of *Love Amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermilion* (2003) and *A Damned Iowa Greyhound: The Civil War Letters of William Henry Harrison Clayton* (1998).

The term *sound bite* did not enter into common usage until the 1970s, but long before that Civil War historians had mastered the technique of using highly selective quotes to support their assertions about the conflict.

Quite often examining scores, or even hundreds, of firsthand accounts written by Civil War soldiers, authors would hone in on one sentence found in them to support their conclusions, disregarding what came before or after that single statement. This usually resulted in treatments of the Civil War that had great breadth, but little depth, regarding the rank and file.

Peter S. Carmichael, director of the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, has adopted a much different approach in *The War for the Common Soldier*. Rather than consider a wide range of primary sources, he has chosen instead to look at the letters and memoirs left by only a very small sampling of Civil War soldiers. He believes that this narrow focus has allowed him to place the experiences of Civil War soldiers into context in a way that studies based on larger samples simply cannot. Employing an intense investigatory technique known as deep focus, he has sought to gain a better understanding of how Civil War soldiers internally processed certain key aspects of their military service, and in doing so kept their sanity in a world gone mad.

As Carmichael states in his introduction, he wanted to explore how, rather than what, Union and Confederate soldiers thought. Ultimately, he found that Civil War soldiers had to develop a pragmatic approach to army life. Whether experiencing the horrors of battle at Gettysburg or enduring the monotonous routine of camp life, soldiers on both sides sought to explain in their accounts how they had maintained their sense of self regardless of the situation they found themselves in. Even those individuals in the book who decided to desert, for example, rationalized their actions as being in keeping with the core values that they had brought with them when they entered military service. The logic they employed is occasionally tortuous but is nonetheless present at all times.

When selecting the individuals who would become the basis for his book, Carmichael chose to include both Union and Confederate soldiers. To make his work more representative, Carmichael used the accounts of soldiers who came from different economic classes and lived in a variety of regions. Some of his subjects survived the war; others died from various causes during the conflict. Finally, Carmichael considered accounts of both officers and enlisted men. Utilizing stories of a diverse set of individuals thus gives Carmichael's book a sense that it speaks to universal, rather than case-specific, wartime experiences.

In most instances, Carmichael finds striking similarities between the ways the soldiers from both sides reacted to military life. Indeed, the Union and Confederate soldiers Carmichael examines spoke of subjects ranging from Divine Providence to courage and cowardice in terms virtually indistinguishable from one another. The only real exception to

this rule comes when Carmichael discusses how the two sides reacted to defeat. In their letters home, Union soldiers displayed an ability to acknowledge their military failures while maintaining their belief that their cause would eventually prevail. Confederates, on the other hand, rarely admitted to a defeat, no matter how significant a setback they had experienced. Moreover, while Union soldiers could usually give their enemy grudging praise for their fighting prowess, up to the end of the war Confederates usually disparaged the martial skills of the Federals. Carmichael suggests that this may have stemmed from Southern white males having to preserve a sense of superiority over others that allowed them to justify their subjugation of people of color.

*The War for the Common Soldier* is a thought-provoking work, but it will undoubtedly fail to impress every Civil War enthusiast. Some, for example, will feel that any book that tells the story of only 20 Civil War soldiers cannot serve as a valid interpretation of "the common soldier." Others—especially those who feel that Civil War historians often overlook the vital contribution to the eventual Union victory played by Federal forces operating west of the Appalachians—may find fault with Carmichael's choice to look only at soldiers who fought in the Eastern theater. Finally, even though by the end of the conflict the Army of the Potomac included thousands of immigrants and African Americans, none of their stories appear in *The War for the Common Soldier*. Still, Carmichael deserves high marks for producing a thought-provoking book on the mental machinations of combatants caught up in our nation's bloodiest conflict. One can only hope that similar in-depth analyses of those groups not included in his book will soon appear.

*Born Criminal: Matilda Joslyn Gage, Radical Suffragist*, by Angelica Shirley Carpenter. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2018. xiv, 284 pp. Maps, illustrations, family tree, notes, bibliography, appendix. \$19.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Sara Egge is Claude D. Pottinger Professor of History at Centre College. She is the author of *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870–1920* (2018).

According to Angelica Shirley Carpenter, Matilda Joslyn Gage ought to have a marble bust in the U.S. Capitol alongside those of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. That trio worked diligently for woman suffrage, yet Anthony and Stanton receive praise as the primary national leaders of the nineteenth century. Yet, as Carpenter reveals, Gage was a principal figure whose work and legacy her so-called friends actively wrote out of history. Carpenter tackles the curious