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# SCWH NEWSLETTER

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## **Tactics, Training, and Combat: The Civil War as an Event in American and World History**

On November 4, Earl J. Hess, Stewart W. McClelland Chair in History at Lincoln Memorial University was awarded the Tom Watson Brown Book Award for 2015 from Tad Brown, president of the Watson-Brown Foundation, for *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Louisiana State University Press). Dr. Hess is the author of twenty-one books, eighteen of which deal with Civil War topics. Below is a summary of Dr. Hess' presentation.

In 1996, Mark Grimsley of Ohio State University wrote a provocative comment on his blog site. Entitled "Why Military History Sucks" it was critical of the old-fashioned nature of Civil War military history. Grimsley characterized it as dated in the face of new trends that emphasized social and cultural aspects of the conflict. The message was clear: military historians need to get up to date or be left out in the cold. I am increasingly convinced that Grimsley was right.

Eighteen years later, I argued in "Where Do We Stand? A Critical Assessment of Civil War Studies in the Sesquicentennial Era," *Civil War History*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (December 2014): 371-403, that traditional military history is an important element in academic Civil War studies and that the field cannot afford to marginalize it, ignore it, or let it die a quiet death.

We cannot afford to let Civil War military history become the sole preserve of amateur historians. Most of them are not capable of doing the extensive archival research, the analysis of key points, or the exploration of new topics that are essential if Civil War military history is to grow out of the doldrums.

There is a pressing need for a new perspective on Civil War military history, how it is done, and what its purpose is, but one wonders if that need will be met by future generations of scholars. Gary W.

Gallagher and Kathryn Shively Meier speak to many important issues in "Coming to Terms with Civil War Military History," *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (December 2014): 487-508, including the dearth of junior level Civil War military historians.

There are many grand opportunities for scholars to take Civil War military history into a new phase in its development, but this will not happen if academic historians are content to write only colorful narratives of battle or engaging biographies of commanders that are geared toward a general audience. They should be introducing new concepts, re-evaluating old ideas, and covering important topics underlying our perception of how armies work. It also will not happen if graduate schools do not pay attention to military history or undergraduate schools fail to teach students that military history is as important as social and cultural history in understanding conflict.

We need to view Civil War military history differently, in a qualitative sense, if we are to have any hope that it will survive in the academy—and its survival in the academy is the key to its survival as a whole. Civil War military historians need to do more than just chronicle battles and the lives of generals; they need to become true military historians.

It is vital, if Civil War military history is to thrive, for it to be framed within new perspectives: for example, the international perspective of Western military history.

Another new perspective lies in the long, American context: how does Civil War military history compare to the military history of the American Revolution, the Mexican-American conflict, or World War I?

Yet another new perspective lies in the search for important aspects of military history that have received little if any attention, such as logistics, supply, and military engineering.

Finally, it is important for Civil War military historians to re-evaluate old chestnuts that litter the

**Cont't on p. 3**

## BOOKS IN REVIEW

Stephen D. Engle, Book Review Editor

**Brian R. McEnany, *For Brotherhood and Duty: The Civil War History of the West Point Class of 1862*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015. Pp. 508. \$45.00.**

Chronicling the exploits of men whose matriculation at West Point and subsequent trial by fire in the field occurred 100 years before his own, retired Lieutenant Colonel Brian R. McEnany's *For Brotherhood and Duty* is clearly a labor of love. Impressively researched and engagingly written, the book follows twelve Union and four Confederate junior officers as they make their way through the academy and into the universe of battle. By privileging a wide array of private and institutional sources, interspersing his effort with numerous personal and scene-setting photographs and maps, and beginning each chapter with a context-providing short narrative from the experiences of his book's most featured soldier (Union First Lieutenant Tully McCrea), McEnany reminds us that the scholarly examination of warfare is never *just* about battles and campaigns. As this fine offering by a soldier-turned-scholar demonstrates, in both its experience and its remembrance, combat is a highly personal event.

**Timothy Wesley, Austin Peay State University**

**Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln's Last Speech: Wartime Reconstruction & the Crisis of Reunion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 247. \$24.95.**

With the sesquicentennial of the Civil War now over, it is not surprising that Reconstruction is receiving renewed focus. In a prescient and timely book, Louis Masur re-examines the beginning of Reconstruction through the lens of Abraham Lincoln's last speech, which was given on April 11, 1865. Masur uses the speech as a springboard from which to assess Lincoln's wartime Reconstruction policies (including his sometimes tenuous relationship with Radical Republicans) and his evolving beliefs regarding the rights of freedmen. He ends with one of the greatest "what-ifs" in American history: if Lincoln had lived, how would Reconstruction, and the process of reconciliation, have been different? According to Masur, Lincoln's "humanity might have led the nation toward the righteous peace that he envisioned for all Americans" (p. 187). While the impact of Lincoln living past 1865 will never be known, Masur weaves a strong, concise narrative recounting the

beginning of a reconstruction that continues to have lasting consequences on the country today.

**Madeleine C. Forrest, University of Arkansas**

**James Carson, *Against the Grain: Colonel Henry M. Lazelle and the U.S. Army*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2015. Pp. 399. \$32.95.**

Henry Lazelle was a poet-warrior whose military career touched almost every important martial event in American history during the second half of the nineteenth century. He graduated West Point in 1855, fought Indians in New Mexico with James Longstreet and Kit Carson, oversaw the parole and exchange of the Confederate captives at Vicksburg in 1863, chased Mosby's Rangers in northern Virginia, oversaw reconstruction in North Carolina, helped map a route for the Northern Pacific Railroad, fought in the Indian Wars of the 1870s, served as Commandant of Corps of Cadets at West Point during the infamous court martial of one of its first African-American cadets, traveled to India to observe British military maneuvers in 1886, supervised the publication of the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, and found time to write an award-winning essay regarding new Army tactics and two books regarding the relationship between science and theology. Having exercised both his body and mind in the service of his country for nearly fifty years, Henry Lazelle retired from the U.S. Army in 1894.

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**President:** Daniel E. Sutherland, Department of History, Old Main 416, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701. Tel. 479-575-5881. E-mail: dsutherl@uark.edu

**Executive Secretary:** Stephen D. Engle, Department of History, Box 3091, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL 33431-0991. Tel. 561-297-2444. E-mail: engle@fau.edu.

**Editor:** Anne J. Bailey. E-mail: scwhnewsletter@yahoo.com or scwhnewsletter@gmail.com.

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Author James Carson's military biography of Henry Lazelle is excellent. Carson is a retired Army and CIA officer with a no-nonsense style of writing. His narrative is clear and supported by strong research, numerous photographs, and several maps. This military biography should interest anyone studying the Civil War or nineteenth-century American military history.

**Mark Barloon, Central College, Pella, Iowa**

### **Hess, Cont'd from p. 1**

historiography—did the fall of Atlanta really ensure Abraham Lincoln's re-election to the presidency in 1864? Was PTSD really as widespread among Civil War veterans as many historians currently argue? And, was the Civil War an unusually "destructive" war within the context of international law or were there important limits to that destructiveness?

I hope that the book which was passed out to you this evening will help take Civil War studies forward. *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness*, (Louisiana State University Press, 2015) is a study of the formations and maneuvers used by both Union and Confederate armies to organize their men, control their movements, and control their fire.

It is the first study of what are often called minor tactics but which I prefer to call primary tactics because they were fundamental to the operation of Civil War regiments. Based on more than 400 tactical examples gleaned from the *Official Records*, it is clear that most unit commanders learned their primary tactics well and became very effective tacticians. Most officers and enlisted men alike, despite their lack of military training before the war, became effective soldiers.

Moreover, I argue that the traditional linear tactical system was not outdated by the introduction of the rifle musket. Instead, it was the correct system to use because soldiers North and South used the rifle much as their predecessors had used smoothbore muskets, for short range rather than long range firing.

*Civil War Infantry Tactics* also places the story of formations and maneuvers within its larger international context, discussing how the linear tactical system evolved in Europe from the late 1600s until 1861, and how it changed to the modern fire team concept of the late twentieth century.

If there is only one point to be taken from my book, I hope it will be that there are many aspects of Civil War military history that are important to all Civil War historians. I hope the book will serve as a challenge to graduate students and to junior Civil War historians not to be afraid of military history. If scholars embrace the potential for reinvigorating traditional military history by exploring the connections that link it with American culture, and with world history, they need have little fear of "career suicide." All aspects of the military experience in the Civil War are important for understanding the conflict as a whole, and there is much to be anticipated in the rejuvenation of Civil War military history during the decades to come.

**Earl J. Hess**

## **MUSTER: THE OFFICIAL BLOG OF THE JCWE**

Don't forget to check out the *Journal of the Civil War Era's* blog, called Muster! At Muster, we explore how studying the antebellum period, Civil War, and Reconstruction can help inform our understanding of the modern world. Recent posts have discussed how Confederate widows coped with loss during the holidays, James Buchanan's strategies for choosing cabinet members, and emancipation's effect on the Electoral College. In addition to publishing work that examines how the past informs the present, we also publish posts discussing pedagogy and public history, reports on recent conferences, plus book and film reviews.

You can find muster at:

<http://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/category/blog>

On the right side of the blog there is a subscription box—just enter your email address, hit "Subscribe," and you will receive an email each time we publish a new post. To locate posts on specific topics, there is a search feature (click on the magnifying glass to the far right to enter your search term). We are also on Twitter (@JCWE1), and please like and follow the journal's Facebook page.

If you would like to contribute, posts average 1,000-2,000 words, use Chicago style, and address one of the above themes. Submit posts to the Digital Media Editor, Kristen Epps, at [kkepps@uca.edu](mailto:kkepps@uca.edu).

## Important Notice for Members

This is a friendly reminder that on January 1 the society's membership rates increased by \$5. The new rates are as follows:

*One Year Student Membership – \$30*

*One Year Student Membership (Foreign) – \$62*

*One Year Regular Membership – \$65*

*One Year Regular Membership (Foreign) – \$97*

### Tom Watson Brown Book Prize Deadline Nears

January 31 is the deadline for nominations for the Tom Watson Brown Book Award of \$50,000. For information on how to submit an entry, go to:

<http://scwhistorians.org>

**Submissions for publication in the SCWH Newsletter should be emailed to Dr. Anne J. Bailey at:**

**[scwhnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:scwhnewsletter@yahoo.com)**

**or**

**[scwhnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:scwhnewsletter@gmail.com)**

*For a short history of the SCWH*

*or*

*For back issues of the newsletter*

*go to*

**<http://scwhistorians.org>**

## 2018 SCWH Biennial Conference

May 31 - June 2, 2018, Omni William Penn  
Hotel, Pittsburgh, PA

*Additional details will be posted on the website  
as they become available.*

### Meeting Dates of the SCWH and SHA

**2017** - November 9-12

Sheraton Dallas Hotel  
Dallas, Texas

**2018** - November 8-11

Sheraton Birmingham Hotel  
Birmingham, Alabama

**2019** - November 7-10

Galt House Hotel  
Louisville, Kentucky

**2020** - November 19-22

Sheraton Memphis Downtown  
Memphis, Tennessee

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