

H-Net Reviews

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James C. Hazlett, Edwin Olmstead, M. Hume Parks. *Field Artillery Weapons of the Civil War*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 322 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07210-9.

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For Artillery Buffs Only

Originally published in 1983, *Field Artillery Weapons of the Civil War* catalogs manufacturers' imprints and other markings on several thousand surviving Civil War era artillery pieces scattered across the country in military parks, museums and assorted public places. It also compiles surviving data from the manufacturers and from the Federal and Confederate governments and individual states and correlates it with the information gleaned from the cannon themselves in order to provide correct identification of the individual pieces. The authors also use technical descriptions, diagrams, and photographs to explain specific attributes of the different types and models of cannon and the methods used to manufacture them. While the authors succeed in supporting their basic thesis, that the Civil War era in America was one of rapid innovation and change in the development of field artillery, they fail to create a work that is likely to be of value to anyone interested in more than the physical attributes of the guns themselves.

The work itself is the product of a good deal of legwork conducted by the authors and dozens of correspondents who assisted in the collection of data, and is impressive in its thoroughness in this regard. The introduction to the second edition consists of four pages of corrections and additional data provided by these and other correspondents over the past twenty years. These corrections and additions mostly serve to supplement the work and to make it slightly more comprehensive, but since these four pages contain the only new material in the work, calling it a "revised edition" seems to be something of an exaggeration.

Within its narrow scope, the work is a useful reference in a number of ways. It offers basic definitions of the different types of artillery used during the war, and explains how they were made and used. The photographs and diagrams should enable readers to identify the different types of guns when they personally view them or see pictures in other books, and might help local historians

and curators to identify pieces in their collections or communities not included in this work. Enterprising visitors to Gettysburg or other military parks might also be able to use the book to spot replicas and forgeries, especially ones like the guns at Gettysburg that the authors show had been modified to look like the ones used in specific phases of the engagement. The work also tracks down as carefully as possible which manufacturers produced which types of guns and in what numbers, pulling together evidence that will be of use to scholars studying the logistical dimensions of the Union and Confederate war efforts.

On a broader scale, however, the book has little to offer to either the professional historian or general reader. It is organized mostly as a manual, discussing each basic type of artillery piece in a separate chapter, with most of each chapter devoted to descriptions of specific variants of that type as produced by different manufacturers or to different specifications. The authors occasionally provide interesting information on the guns' designers or manufacturers or provide a brief account of a particular weapon's use in combat, but the bulk of each chapter is simply descriptive, providing data without much context or analysis. The authors were also unable to determine much about the service histories of the different types of pieces, such as which types of guns were assigned to which individual batteries, something that might have been of use to combat historians describing specific engagements. The book also says relatively little about the production and quality of artillery ammunition and gunpowder, the training of artillerists or the shifting roles of different types of artillery in Civil War military doctrine and practice, all of which had a good deal to do with the demand for and use of the different types of artillery described in it. They also fail to examine innovations and developments in Europe beyond noting when something was imported from Britain or elsewhere, and provide no real indication as to whether the Americans were getting

ahead of the Europeans in terms of artillery technology or doctrine in this period.

Overall, the work is mostly antiquarian in orientation, and makes no real effort to connect its findings to the existing scholarly or even popular literature on the war, making it difficult for the authors to demonstrate the significance or originality of their argument regarding the rapidity of change in artillery design during the

war. Indeed, the basic argument is fairly obvious, and is paralleled by what has been observed regarding the use of hand-held firearms in the Civil War and in any number of studies of the logistical and technological aspects of warfare in the modern era. Anyone interested in how artillery was used during the war, in how its use affected the course of the war, and/or the results of specific campaigns or engagements will be better served by the many other studies of these topics.

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