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Brent Nosworthy. *Roll Call to Destiny: The Soldier's Eye View of Civil War Battles.* New York: Basic Books, 2008. 342 pp. $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7867-1747-7.

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The Civil War through Their Eyes

Brent Nosworthy wrote *Roll Call to Destiny* after the success of his volume *The Bloody Crucible of Courage: Fighting Methods and Combat Experience of the Civil War* (2005). It was while writing that massive tome that the author realized the potential for looking in depth at small unit actions during the American Civil War. For this work, "small units" are defined as "a group that fights as a monolithic entity and thus undergoes similar experiences, rather than a formally defined level of military organization or size of the fighting force" (p. 3). This broad definition of a small unit allows Nosworthy to look at everything from a single section of artillery to a division of troops as a single experience-sharing entity.

By looking at a single unit, such as the Second Minnesota Volunteer Infantry at Missionary Ridge, Chattanooga, or the Seventh South Carolina Cavalry at the Battle of Darbytown Road, Petersburg, the author helps individualize the events of the war. By moving away from commanding generals and actions of whole armies, Nosworthy offers a much fuller picture of personal actions, both heroic and cowardly, of individuals. More important, we are able to see how the actions of just a few can affect a much larger whole. The work includes a number of small unit actions involving fighting, ranging from the Virginia Peninsula all the way out to Fort Hindman in Arkansas. In each case, the analysis is of just a small piece of the engagement, with an overview of the greater battle to help keep the analyzed portion in context.

Beyond this, however, Nosworthy has done something quite original; he not only examines individual units within a larger action, but also analyzes tactical situations facing men on the ground and how they were able or not able to adapt to those situations. Going back to our previously mentioned units for example, the Second Minnesota Volunteer Infantry was deployed as skirmishers during the Union assault on Missionary Ridge. After gaining its initial objective of the Confederate works at the base of the ridge, the regiment found itself under an intense bombardment from Confederate artillery above. "Artillery in the heights above now focused its attention on the rifle pits and rained canister on the Union soldiers below" (p. 247). Thus, it was decided by the men on the spot to push forward and up the ridge face. The regiment's skirmish formation greatly reduced the effectiveness of Confederate artillery and musket fire. This, on top of the increasingly difficult angle of fire being forced on the Confederate defenders, allowed the Second Minnesota to lead a successful penetration of the Confederate Army of the Tennessee. This attack, along with the flanking movements elsewhere, led to the collapse of Confederate General Braxton Bragg's siege of Chattanooga.

In the case of the Seventh South Carolina Cavalry at the Battle of Darbytown Road, we see an interesting combination of mounted and dismounted cavalry tactics. Though in the end the Confederate counterattack at Darbytown Road failed, the actions taken by Seventh South Carolina Cavalry, including dismounted skirmishing and a mounted saber charge, did much to aid the initial Confederate success. The actions of the Seventh South Carolina were a reminder to the Union cavalry, who by this point in the war had developed prowess at least equal to their Southern counterparts, not to discount the abilities and daring of Confederate horsemen. These actions also spoke to the Confederacy's willingness to adapt, even if that meant the use of older shock tactics such as the saber charge. "They were to charge and rely exclusively on the saber, and he [Colonel Alexander C. Haskell] warned his men 'that a pistol fired before the enemy was routed was a death offense"' (p. 261).

It is while putting the units that are fighting into the overall context of the battle that the book hits somewhat of a snag. While the description of the action and the unit's position in regards to its compatriots as well as its opponents is excellent, it is the author's visual aids that

are difficult to understand, specifically the maps that he chose to use. While the maps are very detailed, they are also, in many cases, quite small, making the already tiny specific notes and identifications on many of them very difficult to read without a magnifying glass. This limits the effectiveness of deciphering the battle and puts a strain on the eyes. This, of course, is more of an editing complaint than of the actual work itself.

Roll Call to Destiny is without a doubt a much more layman friendly work than Nosworthy's *Bloody Crucible of Courage*, which goes into minute detail about mid-nineteenth-century warfare and black powder tactics. However, the author, having chosen to do a work looking at the use of tactics by individual groups of soldiers, is unable to completely remove some very technical information. This is especially true in the first chapter, "New Weapons, New Ways of Warfare," and in several tactical analyses specifically planted throughout the manuscript. These sections are quite technical at times and could be difficult to digest for a layman or one with just a passing interest in the American Civil War. Fortunately, the author appears to have foreseen such a problem and, as such, has isolated these tactical reviews and discussions to the first chapter as a whole and to the end of chapters 3, 4, and 10. He even shades these areas to further separate the two parts of the work.

In conclusion, *Roll Call to Destiny* is a triumph of the military history field. Nosworthy gives his innovative subject and groundbreaking research a human edge, making for not only excellent history but also an interesting read that will keep the pages turning.

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