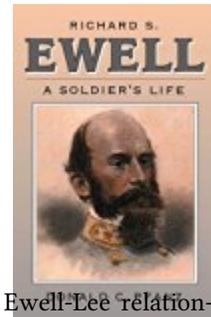


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Donald C. Pfanz. *Richard Sewell: A Soldier's Life*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. xix + 655 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2389-7.

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Lee's "lieutenants" in the Army of Northern Virginia have attracted a lot of attention from Civil War scholars. In addition to the three-volume study by D.S. Freeman, still in print a half century after publication, individual biographies of Thomas J. Jackson, James Longstreet, and A.P. Hill, have become essential works for anyone interested in the Virginia theater. Richard S. Ewell is often the forgotten man in the hierarchy of Lee's army. Indeed, if he is remembered at all, it is often because he is sometimes held responsible for the Confederate loss at Gettysburg where, so the accusation goes, he failed to seize the opportunity to capture Cemetery Hill in the late afternoon of July 1. In this excellent biography, Donald C. Pfanz not only examines that accusation thoroughly, but rescues Ewell from relative anonymity. (Pfanz, incidentally, is the son of Harry W. Pfanz whose multi-volume history of Gettysburg is the most detailed and authoritative work on that subject.)

Three things make Donald Pfanz's book a welcome addition to Civil War literature. First, it is a true biography that includes coverage of Ewell's life and U.S. Army career prior to the Civil War and of his all-too-brief career as a planter in the post war years, as well as his Civil War experiences. This allows the reader to gain a perspective of Ewell the man as well as Ewell the soldier. Second, Pfanz has done his homework. The research is very thorough, and the bibliography testifies to the author's determination to ferret out every possible contemporary source from archives across the country. Third, the book is well written, and despite the impressive detail, the narrative never bogs down in tendentiousness. All in all, this is a first rate work that ranks with James I. Robertson's biographies of A.P. Hill and Stonewall Jackson.

Readers will be especially interested in Pfanz's as-

essment of the Ewell-Jackson and Ewell-Lee relationships. As a division commander in the Shenandoah Valley, Ewell was initially skeptical of Jackson and was particularly annoyed by Stonewall's tendency to keep his plans secret. His annoyance turned to anger when Jackson kept him cooling his heels in the valley for long periods without bothering to offer any explanation or to provide any information about what role Jackson had in mind for his command. Ewell even suspected that Jackson may have been crazy. But the ensuing campaign changed all that, and Ewell became as much an admirer of Jackson as he had been a critic. In just three weeks, Pfanz writes, "he (Ewell) had gone from being his harshest critic to his most loyal subordinate. In the end, he became The Right Arm of Jackson."

At Groveton just prior to the battle of Second Manassas (Bull Run), Ewell was badly wounded. He lost a leg to amputation and had to surrender command of his division. He thus missed the campaigns of Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville. At the last of these, Jackson himself fell mortally wounded and in the subsequent reorganization of the army, Lee selected Ewell, just returned from his convalescence, to take over command of the Second Corps.

In hindsight, it seems evident that Ewell was doomed to disappoint in this new capacity. First of all, he had to replace Jackson, and no one could do that. Whatever Jackson's actual merits as a corps commander, his status as a martyr after Chancellorsville meant that whoever replaced him would likely be found wanting by comparison. Second, Ewell had to adjust to an entirely different command style. Whereas Jackson had expected—even demanded—unthinking obedience from his subordinates, Lee was more likely to indicate the military ob-

jective and leave it to his subordinate to determine how best to accomplish it. As Pfanz notes: "As a subordinate of Stonewall Jackson, he had been taught to obey orders, not to interpret them. Discretionary orders like those issued by Lee made him uncomfortable" (p. 303).

Ewell's first campaign in command of a corps was Gettysburg. He started off well enough, leading the army's advance down the valley and winning a decisive victory at Winchester. But at Gettysburg itself, he is nearly everyone's favorite scapegoat. On the whole, Pfanz finds Ewell not guilty for his decision not to assault Cemetery Hill on the evening of July 1. Given the circumstances, he asserts, Ewell's decision was a reasonable one. But Pfanz does suggest that Ewell could have—and should have—taken Culp's Hill. Moreover, Pfanz maintains that Ewell's command decision-making did not improve. He states plainly, "The second of July was one of Ewell's worst days" (p. 23). Perhaps so. But much of the evidence suggesting that Ewell was insufficiently aggressive that day comes from post-war champions of the Lost Cause who offered their judgements many years later and who were very likely seeking a scapegoat of their own. Pfanz quotes both Henry Kyd Douglas (who wrote in 1892) and James P. Smith (who wrote in 1905), both of whom were almost certainly affected by a desire to prove that but for an unfortunate oversight, the South would have won the day—and the war. Pfanz himself notes that much of the blame—if, indeed, that is the right word—for missing whatever opportunity there may have been on July 2 belonged to Ewell's subordinates (most of whom were trained in the Stonewall Jackson tradition of blind obedience): James A. Walker (in command of the Stonewall Brigade), Robert Rodes, and Jubal Early, whose persistent suggestions, Pfanz notes, were as obstinate as they were wrong.

Whatever blame Ewell may or may not have deserved for the army's defeat at Gettysburg, Pfanz makes it clear that Lee began to lose confidence in him from that day forward. Indeed, the slow unraveling of the Lee-Ewell relationship is one of the most interesting themes of the book. Pfanz shows how Lee's views were molded over time by a series of disappointments. One factor was a growing lack of confidence in Ewell within the Second Corps. In part, this derived from Ewell's marriage in 1863 to Lizinka Brown. Old Baldy obviously doted on his rich new wife—too much so, in the opinion of many in the Second Corps who thought it inappropriate for a

corps commander to appear to be at the beck and call of a mere woman. But more importantly for Lee, Ewell undermined his own credibility with the army commander at Spotsylvania by giving in to bursts of temper and strings of profanity. Without saying it in so many words, Pfanz makes it clear how Lee could have concluded that a man who lost control of his temper could also lose control of a battlefield.

Eventually, Lee used the excuse of Ewell's supposed ill health to ease him from his command. Lee abhorred confrontation, and hoped that Ewell would get the hint and go away; but Ewell was not about to be shunted aside easily. He refused to yield gracefully and forced Lee to send him away without the fig leaf of ill health as an excuse. Banned from the Army of Northern Virginia, Ewell took up duties as the commander of the District of Richmond, a mostly administrative and purely defensive responsibility. Prematurely old, he nevertheless rose to the occasion in the winter of 1864-65 to help repel Butler's assault on the Richmond-Petersburg lines. It was not enough, of course, and Pfanz offers a particularly vivid description of the evacuation of Richmond in April 1865, and the last stand of the A.N.V. at Sailor's Creek.

Pfanz relies primarily upon narrative to make his points, but he is not afraid to render judgements. In addition to his assessments of Jackson and Lee, he offers thoughtful and occasionally sharp-edged views about other officers with whom Ewell served, men such as Isaac Trimble (headstrong and undisciplined), Jubal Early (ambitious, critical, and outspoken to the point of insubordination), and Richard H. Anderson (polite and reserved with thoughtful eye and a neat scholarly appearance). As for Ewell himself, Pfanz is generally admiring but not uncritical. "Ewell was an excellent officer," he writes, "but he lacked decision and had an uncertain temper that caused him to be optimistic one moment and pessimistic the next."

Eleven appendices address specific historiographical or chronological issues associated with Ewell's career, and the 86 pages of notes are another mine of information. All in all, this is a valuable work certain to be the standard source on Ewell.

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