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Peter S. Carmichael. *Lee's Young Artillerist: William R. J. Peagram.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995. 209 pp. $29.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-1611-8.

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By the spring of 1865, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia maintained a tenuous hold over its defensive positions outside Petersburg. William R. J. Peagram, a twenty-three-year-old lieutenant colonel of artillery, commanded one of the army's most seasoned battalions. He had been with the army since its earliest days. Devoted to the cause and possessing an unwavering belief that God would see the South through its baptism of fire, Peagram never lost faith in a final victory. He would not live to see the dashing of his hopes. At Five Forks on 1 April 1865, Peagram's war came to an end when a Union bullet found its mark. He had become one of Lee's favorite officers despite his youth. The general would note his passing with sadness.

Peter S. Carmichael's biography of Peagram paints a compelling picture of a young man's journey into war. The study makes a decided contribution to our understanding of mid-grade officers who commanded at company through brigade and division level. Similar biographies of Stephen D. Ramseur, John Pelham, and William Pendleton are part of a recent trend that has been long overdue in Civil War literature. However important the views of politicians and general officers may be to our understanding of the conflict, it was at Peagram's level that strategic planning was translated into the operational and tactical aspects of war. Carmichael takes us inside the Army of Northern Virginia's artillery corps to give a detailed look at artillery employment as well as associated problems with organization and ordnance.

In addition, the author addresses the ongoing debate concerning Southern nationalism by highlighting the idealistic commitment that tied Peagram to his beloved South. The values and beliefs that motivated Peagram can be summarized in three words: God, country, and family. Peagram's approach to leadership followed his values. He was always prominently among the guns in the thickest of the fighting. By electing to remain mounted, he positioned himself where his men could draw courage from his example. Peagram's style of leadership was an act of faith made necessary by the ties of duty.

Carmichael depicts Peagram as an effective and dynamic leader, but in this contention, there is room for debate. Leadership carries with it responsibilities to both mission and men. Peagram understood the first. He showed himself to be a skilled officer who knew well the warrior's art. Nonetheless, he was a driven man, seeking combat even when it was not his turn to test the mettle of his soldiers. They frequently paid dearly for his exuberance. At Mechanicsville, forty-six out of his ninety-two soldiers fell in battle. Carmichael concedes that Peagram needlessly exposed his gunners to Federal artillery on that occasion while inflicting little damage on the enemy. At Malvern Hill, it was more of the same with Peagram's exposed battery being the focus of a disproportionate number of Union guns. One hour after opening fire, Peagram had only enough men standing to crew one gun.

At this point in the war, senior officers in the Army of Northern Virginia had a tendency to believe that behaving "manfully" in combat was synonymous with good leadership. Peagram's soldiers may have had a different take on the quality of his leadership. After a Union artillery round decimated one of Peagram's reconstituted gun crews at Second Manasass, the open discontent among his men forced the young officer to confront the issue. He called his men into formation and told them that any man who had lost faith in his leadership should step forward. If a majority of the battery did so, he would resign his commission and enter the ranks. For those willing to demonstrate the courage of their convictions, he assured them that they could expect transfer to another unit. He offered his word as an officer to guarantee the bargain. No one moved. However, this fact should not be taken as proof that their faith in Peagram remained unshaken. Loyalty to peers and superi-

ors is a primary factor accounting for unit cohesion. It is more likely that Peagram's men stood firm for this reason rather than from faith in their leader. War carries with it the explicit assumption that an officer must be able to order his soldiers into harm's way. Peagram's problem was one of understanding the measure of things, to know when to risk his men and when to wait.

This issue of interpretation aside, Carmichael's biography of William Peagram remains a must read for enthusiasts of the war. The author's prose has the spirit to pull the reader into the life of a young officer who believed passionately in the justice of his cause. For those of us who live in a time when "duty" and "honor" are words without meaning to many, Peagram's example from another day is refreshingly reassuring.

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