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Earl J. Hess. *Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee: Field Fortifications in the Overland Campaign.* Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. Maps, illustrations. xviii + 313 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3154-0.

Earl J. Hess. *In the Trenches at Petersburg: Field Fortifications and Confederate Defeat.* Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Maps, illustrations. 480 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3282-0.

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Digging and Fighting: Fieldworks and Operational Art in Civil War Virginia

With the publication of seven books on Civil War military history, Earl J. Hess has established himself as one of the most provocative Civil War historians working today. Hess's books debunk established myths and challenge conventional wisdom in a number of areas. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (1997) is considered a landmark work in the discussion of the motivation of Civil War soldiers, and *Pickett's Charge: The Final Assault at Gettysburg* (2002) is a detailed reconstruction of that myth-enshrouded few hours in July 1863. Much of Hess's recent research has chipped away at the idea, taken almost as gospel for decades, that the rifle musket, in the hands of Union and Confederate soldiers, changed the nature of combat in the nineteenth century and led to the extensive casualty lists of many Civil War battles. In his *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat* (2007), Hess demonstrates through exhaustive research that Civil War armies still fought at ranges more akin to those of eighteenth-century battles, and that Civil War soldiers never fully utilized the longer effective ranges of the rifle musket. Following this argument, then, what factors explain the high casualty rates of Civil War armies?

A major factor, clearly, was the widespread use of field fortifications, hastily constructed trenches and gun emplacements meant to shelter troop formations. Constructed initially by inexperienced units, these "fieldworks" started out very simply, becoming more complex and extensive as the war went on and the armies gained experience building them. With the publication of *Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee* and *In the Trenches at Petersburg*, Hess completes a landmark trilogy of studies, begun with *Field Armies and Fortifications in the Civil War: The Eastern Campaigns, 1861-1864* (2005), that focuses on the development and use of field fortifications in the war's eastern theater.

In the opening work in the series, Hess establishes field fortification as a feature of eastern battlefields going back to the clash at Big Bethel, Virginia, in 1861. *Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee* and *In the Trenches at Petersburg* continue the same overall approach, tracing campaigns with a focus on the construction and use of fieldworks in specific battles. In the opening chapter of each book we are introduced to Regular Army and volunteer engineer officers who brought their education and experiences to the battlefields. The maps, diagrams, photographs (both historical and modern), and detailed descriptions of the various fortification systems are impressive by themselves, but much more valuable when placed in the context of the Overland and Petersburg campaigns. These two campaigns are among the war's most complex, and are each the subject of multiple monographs and studies, among them Gordon C. Rhea's multivolume series on the Overland campaign and books on specific phases of the Petersburg campaign by Richard J. Sommers and A. Wilson Greene.[1] Hess does both the casual reader and the specialist a great service with his single-volume treatment of these complex campaigns.

In *Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee*, Hess argues that during the 1864 Overland campaign, both armies resorted to more widespread use of field fortifications because of General Ulysses S. Grant's operational decision to maintain constant contact with the Army of Northern Virginia. General Robert E. Lee's army developed

increasingly complex, layered systems of field fortifications to repel Union attacks and offset Confederate disadvantages in infantry and artillery. Grant, in contrast, sought to use field fortifications both to shelter his divisions between attacks and to serve as jumping-off points for those attacks. Rather than the rifle musket, as Hess asserts in his preface, "it was the presence of the Army of the Potomac that inspired the Confederates to dig in so extensively during the Overland campaign" (p. xv). Weeks of unremitting combat, much of it at close quarters, facilitated by entrenchments, led to heavy casualties, not the rifle musket. Moreover, fortifications did not turn the Overland campaign into a siege. This was a campaign of linked battles of maneuver, in which field fortifications played a decisive role in shaping the outcome of various engagements.

In separate chapters on the battles of the Overland campaign, plus a chapter on the often-overlooked fighting at Bermuda Hundred in May 1864, Hess methodically makes his case for the crucial role of fieldworks in shaping operational and tactical outcomes. Many of these moments and places are enshrined in our collective memory: the Union II Corps' entrenchments along the Brock Road at the Wilderness; the Confederate "Mule Shoe" at Spotsylvania; Lee's "inverted V" line at the North Anna River; and most famously, the killing fields at Cold Harbor. Hess shows in all of these cases that fieldworks were byproducts of maneuver, not the end of it. The author covers familiar ground in writing about these battles, but does it in a brisk, informative way, offering his own analysis of command decisions and outcomes.

Of all of the Civil War's major campaigns, the Petersburg campaign is the least studied, due partly to its complexity and far-flung nature. It has defied easy categorization, with historians unable to agree even on the proper framework to describe its battles. This is a shame, because Hess labels the campaign "the longest, the most complex, and perhaps the most important" of the Civil War (p. xiii). He uses the Sommers's horology of nine distinct phases or "offensives," beginning with the First Petersburg attacks on the city in mid-June 1864, and ending with the Ninth Offensive that cracked Lee's defenses once and for all on April 2, 1865. The quality of this book will no doubt establish this framework as the definitive conception. In spite of the extensive research of Sommers, Greene, and others, Petersburg has come down to us as a formal siege whose outcome was preordained even as it began. The participants certainly did not see it that way, and both Grant and Lee continued to view fortification as a measure of force protection and a method of continuing to maneuver against each other. This point is clearest when one views the Petersburg campaign at the operational level, and it is here that Hess maintains his focus. Grant in particular was consistent in this regard. Virtually every one of his Petersburg offensives involved using smaller numbers of well-fortified troops to hold Confederate defenders in place while shifting forces to attack other parts of the line. The Third and Fourth Offensives, commonly referred to as the First and Second Battles of Deep Bottom, demonstrate this method. In both instances, Grant initially left a skeleton defensive force (in relative terms) south of the James River and moved a strong striking force north of the James to attack the Richmond end of Lee's line. Both attempts failed, but Grant never really stopped trying; the Third Offensive led directly to perhaps the most famous incident of the campaign, the June 30, 1864, fight for the Crater. The Union Fifth Offensive featured attempts on both sides of the line, north of the James at Chaffin's Bluff and southwest of Petersburg at Peebles' Farm. On the other side of the line, Lee himself used the Petersburg lines to hold Union forces in place, but thought on a grander scale, sending an entire corps west to the Shenandoah Valley to harry Union forces and, in July 1864, to threaten Washington itself.

In March 1865, Lee's last offensive at Fort Stedman used the fieldworks at Colquitt's Salient as a jumping-off point, and a few days later, the Union Sixth Corps left newly constructed lines along the Boydton Plank Road to crack the Confederate defense once and for all. This breakthrough led to the disintegration of the Confederate position around Richmond and Petersburg, and to the surrender at Appomattox a few days later.

Trench Warfare under Grant and Lee and *In the Trenches at Petersburg* will appeal to both the specialist and the general reader. The most unique feature of these two books is the author's ability to write a concise but comprehensive narrative of the campaigns, while also addressing the technical aspects of fortifications and the engineer officers and troops whose job it was to design and build them. Even without the incredibly detailed analysis of field fortifications, they would stand alone as campaign history. The appendices, maps, and photographs in each volume make them useful for the battlefield walker and stand as a testament to the author's years of study on the topic.

The quality of the author's analysis and research, combined as always with the high production values of the University of North Carolina Press, make these volumes a pleasure to read. As the Civil War sesquicentennial approaches, Hess's fieldworks trilogy will stand for

some time as the last word on this subject, and the final two books will become a valued resource on these two desperately contested campaigns.

Note

[1]. Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battles For Spotsylvania Courthouse and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7-12, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Gordon C. Rhea, *To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Gordon C. Rhea, *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26-June 3, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); Richard J. Sommers, *Richmond Redeemed: The Siege at Petersburg* (New York: Doubleday, 1981); and A. Wilson Greene, *Breaking the Backbone of the Rebellion: The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign* (El Dorado Hills: Savas, 2000).

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