

# H-Net Reviews

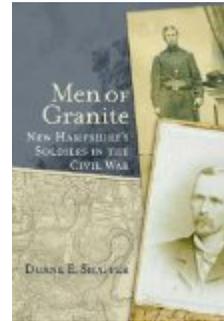
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Duane E. Shaffer. *Men of Granite: New Hampshire's Soldiers in the Civil War*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008. 265 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-751-1.

Reviewed by Eric P. Totten (University of Central Florida)

Published on H-CivWar (December, 2010)

Commissioned by Hugh F. Dubrulle



## Remembering Fallen Heroes Is Not Just for Memorial Day

In the decades after the Civil War, regiments, towns, and states published hundreds of accounts of the trials and tribulations that brave men and women endured during the war. Former soldiers, officers, politicians, and official historians published these histories to acknowledge and remember the heroism and sacrifice of their respective soldier boys. This general trend in Civil War historiography lasted for decades before scholarship shifted to micro-studies of individual battles or specific phenomena that occurred in the war. Studies of a single state's military affairs persisted in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, these works are increasingly scarce in comparison to academic works on the social and cultural impact of the war on Northern and Southern communities.

Duane E. Shaffer's *Men of Granite* offers a narrow study of the wartime experiences of New Hampshire's soldiers. The author's stated purpose is to remember the service and contribution of the Granite State's warriors, which has gradually dimmed with the remoteness of time and the veil of history. This work is not a social, cultural, or synthetic history of New Hampshire's population and citizen soldiers during the war. Rather, it is a more traditional military history that uses recent scholarship of other historians to provide additional primary and secondary sources that were either overlooked or unavailable to other authors. The outcome is a work that very successfully compiles myriad sources on all the units of New Hampshire, describes every battle or skirmish they were involved with, and weaves them into a breathless

narrative of sacrifice and patriotism. However, despite the successful gathering of sources for this work, the recent advances in scholarships that delve into how culture, society, and the home front affected the war and the soldiers who fought in it remain largely overlooked in this work. As a consequence, any enlightening insights into the motivation or conduct of troops, the effect of politics and religion on soldiers, and other such hallmarks of the last thirty years of academic writing are all but absent from this work.

The author's introduction starts in the antebellum period and outlines some general trends in New Hampshire's development, the basic economic changes incurred by the Industrial Revolution, and the politics of the state up through the secession crisis. Shaffer follows the trends of previous state-level military histories by focusing on political events, like the fall of the Whig Party, the rise of the Republican Party, and Abraham Lincoln's support in the Granite State. Such topics as religion, racial attitudes, and women are largely overlooked as the author merely describes New Hampshire's stance on slavery and Southern secession to put the state's manpower commitment into perspective.

Each chapter beyond the introduction is broken up into chronological events; some chapters span entire years, others a single month. Each chapter title contains the dates that will be covered along with a quotation from a soldier that serves as the somber title of each chapter, providing the reader with a hint of the chapter's focus.

For instance, chapter 1 deals with the Granite State's response to the national crisis, the raising of the first volunteer regiments, and their limited participation in Bull Run and other skirmishes in 1861. The second chapter picks up in January 1862 through June 1862 and likewise follows how regiments were raised, where they went, and what they experienced. Subsequent chapters follow this pattern of chronological organization.

Shaffer's narrative is driven by the soldiers' words themselves, which are then contextualized to an extent using his numerous secondary sources. Shaffer weaves together dozens of personal accounts throughout the war, covering every aspect of a battle in which New Hampshire soldiers participated and verifies these accounts with secondary studies. However, the author simultaneously skips over large portions of the war that saw no participation of New Hampshire regiments. Consequently, the narrative can become cumbersome, as the author jumps from battlefield to battlefield and from one chronological point of the war to another, to follow a particular soldier so that he is not forgotten in the book's subsequent chapters. Yet, considering the scope of the author's work and his simple desire to give each unit its due credit, Shaffer manages to keep his narrative tight and understandable for readers.

As stated before, the author's primary focus is on the different incidents affecting every New Hampshire regiment, along with any military contribution the Granite State made, such as the vessels constructed at the naval shipyard in Portsmouth. Broader aspects of New Hampshire's home front in relation to the experience of its soldiers do not even make the bibliography (for example, Paul Cimbal and Randall M. Miller's edited collection *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences Postwar Adjustments* [2002]). Only military events told through the soldiers' words and actions drive the narrative's chronological organization. This work follows similar patterns of discussion as the works of other New Hampshire historians, like Cleveland Mather's *New Hampshire Fights the Civil War* (1969) and Otis Frederick Reed Waite's *New Hampshire in the Great Rebellion* (1870), as evidenced by the author's copious citations of their works.

The author's methodology is again traditional, including as it does service records, battle reports, official regimental histories, grave records, and many secondary sources that range from William C. Davis's *Battle of Bull Run* (1977) to Gordon C. Rhea's *The Road to Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern* (1997).

These records and secondary studies undoubtedly contain a plethora of information that the author could have better used to elaborate "on the stories of the New Hampshire soldiers themselves so that we can better appreciate their part in the greater struggle" (p. xi). The author tries to achieve this aim through a strict military focus and unfortunately does not capture the breadth of the soldiers' participation in the Civil War. The consequence of this strategy is that women, religion, society, the intermingling of politics and war, economics, and the home front remain largely obscure in this book.

As Shaffer's work does not rely heavily on academic sources or the historiography of modern military historians, it is clear that this book is intended for the general public as well as undergraduate students, rather than a graduate and academic readership. The author successfully writes his work for his audience's comprehension and provides a detailed account of the war through the words of New Hampshire soldiers. However, given the intended audience of this work, the author is at times lackadaisical in his treatment of Civil War terminology, topics, and events, which may be more obscure to his audience. For example, after reading the first chapter, the reader will know that two New Hampshire politicians went to Washington D.C. for the Washington Peace Conference in 1861. However, what the conference specifically entailed, its resolutions, or the actions of those New Hampshire politicians at this conference will remain a mystery to readers after completing the chapter. Furthermore, the author's prose is at times cumbersome and spelling errors and poor grammar diminishes the narrative's effectiveness.

Despite these drawbacks, the author is successful in compiling a well-researched list of primary and secondary sources on New Hampshire's military regiments and the battles in which they fought, going far beyond the work done by previous regimental and town historians. As a result, this work is a useful tool for scholars who need direction to additional sources that are related to the Granite State's troops or the events in which they were involved. Furthermore, the author pays special attention throughout his work to the resting place of numerous soldiers and officers who fell during the war. Shaffer implores his audience to remember these fallen warriors beyond just Memorial Day, by paying tribute to all the soldiers of the war by ensuring their grave sites are properly maintained and respected.

*Men of Granite* is a work of value to anyone interested in knowing more about soldiers from New Hampshire

and their firsthand accounts of one of the most important and traumatic events in American history. Scholars who are interested in soldiers from New Hampshire or their accounts of particular battles will also benefit from consulting this work, if for the bibliography alone. In the end, Shaffer accomplishes his mission of acknowledging the debt we owe to the men and women of New Hampshire for their service and sacrifice, by remembering their selfless deeds.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-civwar>

**Citation:** Eric P. Totten. Review of Shaffer, Duane E., *Men of Granite: New Hampshire's Soldiers in the Civil War*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. December, 2010.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31924>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.