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Martin N. Bertera, Kim Crawford. *The 4th Michigan Infantry in the Civil War.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010. 560 pp. $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87013-973-4.

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Narrating the 4th Michigan's War

The subject of common soldiers' experiences in the U.S. Civil War has become a topic of extensive research in recent decades. The subject arose from the regimental histories written by the veterans themselves. The historiography of Civil War soldiers' experiences then shifted to include the motivations for fighting, starting with Bell Irvin Wiley's classic examinations of common soldiers in the Confederate and Union armies, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (1943) and *The Life of Billy Yank* (1952). Similar cultural studies boomed in the 1980s and 1990s and continue to be the focus of many monographs into the twenty-first century. Martin N. Bertera, co-author of *The 4th Michigan Volunteer Infantry at Gettysburg* (1997), and Kim Crawford, author of *The 16th Michigan Infantry* (2002), however, attempt to return to the original formats of regimental histories with *The 4th Michigan Infantry in the Civil War*. They approach the subject by examining the experience of the 4th Michigan Infantry Regiment, both the initial organization that mustered out of service in 1864 and the reorganized unit that stayed in service until 1866. The result is a work that presents a well-written narrative of the men's time in the Union forces and what their experiences meant to them during the conflict.

Bertera and Crawford follow the regiment chronologically through the war. They start with the response of Michigan to the secession crisis of 1860-61 and the firing on Fort Sumter, paying particular attention to the men that enlisted with the 4th Michigan. Bertera and Crawford then follow these men's trials and tribulations in the Army of the Potomac as they marched and fought in some of the bloodiest battles of the war. Each chapter after the first centers on a major battle in which the regiment saw action. For example, chapter 2 focuses on the lead-up to, fighting at, and aftermath of the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas), and chapter 10 examines the Battle of Gettysburg. The monograph also examines the reorganized 4th Michigan, which included some of the veterans of the initial unit that fought in Virginia, as they faced the monotonous occupation of Texas in 1865-66. It concludes by offering brief descriptions of the veterans' lives after the conflict. After telling these men's stories, the authors include a copy of the entire 4th Michigan roster, both the original formation and the reorganized regiment.

The purpose of this book as laid out by Bertera and Crawford is to "construct a history of the 4th Michigan that [is] more than a recitation of marches and maneuvers and positions on battlefields, but one that [is] human and personal." Also, they hope to show how the "narrative informs their [the 4th Michigan's] role in some of the most important battles of the war–sometimes when they were in the very thick of the fighting, and sometimes when they weren't" (p. vii). The authors fulfilled their goals. By using the words of the soldiers, taken from their diaries, letters, and memoirs, Bertera and Crawford create a strong narrative of the men's experiences in battle and in camp. Through this incorporation, the authors create vivid descriptions of the bloodshed in each of the battles where the 4th Michigan saw action. By using so many different voices, however, the reader can get lost trying to remember who is who. An unintended advantage of privileging the voices of those who fought with the regiment is that throughout the narrative the reader catches glimpses of the motivations that caused these men to fight in the Army of the Potomac. These glimpses confirm the analyses of previous scholarly studies, for example Joseph Glatthaar's *The March to the Sea and Beyond* (1985), James McPherson's *For Cause and Comrades* (1997), and Chandra Manning's *What This Cruel War Was Over* (2007), which emphasize patriotism, honor, and slavery. Yet, the descriptions of the 4th Michigan's battle experiences vividly illuminate the sacrifice that these men made for their nation during one of the most uncertain of times in U.S. history.

The authors' methodology also brings a number of

new sources to light. The majority of their primary sources are drawn from the local archives of Michigan universities and libraries. Some of the letters and diaries, however, are held in the private collections of the descendents of the men in the 4th Michigan. The authors thus use sources that may not have been previously available to researchers. The narrative is based on these letters, diaries, and memoirs, as well as traditional sources for regimental and military histories, such as battle reports and service records, and then filled in with secondary works. These secondary sources range from broad campaign studies, such as Edwin Coddington's dated *The Gettysburg Campaign* (1963) and Civil War anecdotal narratives, such as Shelby Foote's *The Civil War: A Narrative* (1958), to narrowly focused, but more reliable studies on specific battles, such as Harry Pfanz's *Gettysburg: The Second Day* (1987). Bertera and Crawford's traditional approach overlooks a number of aspects of Michigan and its soldiers in the Civil War. Although the men's Civil War experiences also encompassed social and cultural topics, such as the home front, abolition, and civilian support in Michigan, these remain largely overlooked.

The authors' stated purpose for writing the monograph clearly shows that the book is intended for a popular audience. The narrow focus on a Michigan regiment will likely appeal most to people interested in the role of Michigan and its citizens during the Civil War. Yet it is also likely to attract those who are interested in learning about the actions of specific regiments. But two problems tend, at times, to bring down the quality of the narrative. First, the authors lack focus in some paragraphs when they place unrelated stories or events together. Second, sloppy editing in a number of spots makes the narrative choppy and cumbersome.

Despite its setbacks, *The 4th Michigan Infantry in the Civil War* presents a strong narrative about the regiment and its actions from its initial creation in 1861 until the mustering out of the reorganized regiment in 1866. The authors realized their goal of presenting the story of the 4th Michigan through the words of the regiment's troops in order to create a humanizing effect. For people interested in Michigan during the Civil War, this book would make a strong addition to their collection.

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