



Albert O. Marshall. *Army Life: From a Soldier's Journal: Incidents, Sketches, and Record of a Union Soldier's Army Life, in Camp and Field, 1861-1864*. Edited by Robert G. Schultz. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2009. 400 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55278-917-9.

Reviewed by Daniel Sauerwein

Published on H-CivWar (January, 2011)

Commissioned by Hugh F. Dubrulle

A Great Work by One Who Lived It

Albert O. Marshall, veteran of the Thirty-Third Illinois Infantry Regiment, wrote an impressive account of his service based on a journal he kept during the Civil War. The genesis of this work makes a unique primary source, as it contains elements of the diary, but is organized as a memoir.

Marshall's saga begins with his enlistment in Company A of the Thirty-Third. He provides a rich description of the first night in the camp of instruction at Camp Butler and discusses how he learned to become a soldier. He notes subjects like religion and explains the use of specific equipment, including knapsacks.

After his training, Marshall embarked on a long journey through the war, centering on the Trans-Mississippi and western theaters. Marshall's war began in Missouri and progressed into Arkansas. 1863 found Marshall participating in the siege at Vicksburg. After Vicksburg, the Thirty-Third found itself serving on the Gulf Coast in Louisiana and Texas. Marshall briefly served with the Ninety-Ninth Illinois Infantry, rejoined the Thirty-Third, spent some time in New York, and returned to Illinois in 1864, his war service over.

Marshall was a deeply committed man, believing in the cause he fought for. When the time came for the Thirty-Third to reenlist, Marshall, having suffered several bouts of illness due to the Southern climate, decided not to reenlist. He noted how it was not in his nature to agree to serve again and then not do so. Further, he felt

that if he committed to three more years of service, he would rather remain at the front than in the rear (p. 237).

While most of his memoir discusses the everyday occurrences in the life of a soldier (battles, food, illness, camp life, and so on), he also includes references to politics, officers, the media, and the influence of these on the soldiers. He notes the visit of Gov. Richard Yates of Illinois who spoke with the men of his state serving in the army and that they were enthusiastic about his visit (p. 131).

Marshall notes that many officers were criticized justly. However, he asserts that General Grant was popular and a very capable officer who cared about his men. He also notes Grant's sharp memory in that Grant knew the position of his army down to the company level (pp. 180-181). He also defends Lt. Col. Potter, his former company commander, from criticism over that officer's treatment of those in the regiment who decided not to reenlist (pp. 236-237).

Marshall claims that the men did not discuss politics very often, except for one notable exception (p. 121). He sees fit to include the proceedings of a public meeting involving the Thirty-Third and Ninety-Ninth Illinois Infantry regiments to discuss the actions of the recently elected Illinois legislature, which was viewed as sympathizing with the Confederate cause (pp. 121-126). The inclusion of such an event is important—not only are such items usually absent from soldier memoirs, but they also

reinforce Marshall's point regarding politics in the army; while the men may have kept such matters to themselves, the possibility of treasonous behavior by their elected politicians back home was of extreme importance. Soldiers needed to make known that while they were fighting for a cause they believed in, those back home were expected to support their efforts and refrain from undermining them.

Slavery does factor into this memoir, as Marshall mentions the institution a couple times. One instance involves two different slave owners entering his camp when the regiment was in Arkansas. One owner treated the soldiers with such disrespect that the men would have risked shame and punishment by disobeying orders to help locate a runaway, while another owner, who was more respectful, was able to retrieve his slave (pp. 66-68).

The other major incident Marshall refers to occurred outside of Vicksburg, where a runaway slave joined a local black unit being formed (Marshall describes the man as contraband) and the man prevented his master from passing, per orders, even threatening to bayonet him (pp. 178-179). These examples make it difficult to ascertain the opinion of the Thirty-Third towards slavery. Marshall seems to indicate that the soldiers appeared indifferent towards slavery, so long as they were respected by Southerners (p. 67).

In addition to his account of service in the army, Marshall includes a wonderful essay dealing with what soldiers thought about when they were not fighting. As the editor, Robert Schultz, asserts, this essay reflects the background of the Thirty-Third, many of whom were college-educated (pp. 243, 318). Marshall indicates that the inclusion of the essay is unique, as most were usually thrown away (pp. 243). This piece addresses a number of issues that were important to the North during the war, including slavery. Furthermore, it expresses Marshall's attitude towards race and how it changed over the course of the war. Where he had once viewed blacks as inferior, and a risk to emancipate, after encountering enough slaves, he eventually came to believe that slaves deserved their freedom. He still viewed them as inferior, and believed that even free, they would be content with positions that a member of "the proud Anglo-Saxon race would never long endure" (p. 246).

Schultz has done a superb job maintaining the integrity of Marshall's original work, while adding helpful material that provides important background for readers. Schultz includes notes, a bibliography, an index, images

of several prominent men in the regiment, and period maps detailing the places where the unit fought. Schultz also provides several great appendices devoted to the regiment's newspaper, *The Normal Picket*, the scarcity of soldier letters in the Trans-Mississippi theater, accounts of the regiment published in the local press in Normal, Illinois, and excerpts from the *Official Record* dealing with cotton. These appendices provide additional unique information related to Marshall and his comrades who fall outside the scope of his memoir.

One of the best features of this book is Marshall's organizational structure. In addition to clear chapter titles, he also uses section breaks, denoting places or subjects relating to the unit. These breaks allow readers unfamiliar with the subject to navigate the book easily. Scholars will also benefit from being able to find specific subjects relating to the common soldier.

The organizational structure is aided by the detailed, yet simple prose that Marshall used. Marshall was an educated man who attended college until the war intervened. He later went to law school (p. ix). His education allowed his memoir to serve as a fine example of writing from the common soldier, while retaining a simplicity and youthful tone that allows it to stand among other fine Civil War memoirs.

As noted above, Robert Schultz has included several good maps, photographs, and drawings to add a visual flair to the memoir. Maps detailing several battles, especially around Vicksburg, are helpful to readers unfamiliar with the locations involved. However, the book does not have a large map covering the entire area where Marshall fought and marched. The absence of this map is problematic, as it presumes a level of geographic knowledge the reader may not possess. Further, since Marshall refers to several small towns and remote locations in his memoir, a large map plotting these locations would better depict the enormous area in which he served, which ranged from Missouri to the Gulf Coast of Texas.

Overall, Marshall's work is a wonderful account from a private soldier in the Union army. It is similar in many ways to other memoirs, like Leander Stillwell's *Story of a Common Soldier* (1920), but provides a few key differences that make it a unique work, including the essay on soldier views, as well as the fact that it does not follow the regiment to the end of the war since Marshall was discharged in late 1864. General readers will delight in the detailed story of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi theater, while scholars will have the opportunity to add another primary source to the expanding body of litera-

ture on soldiers, especially one written by a soldier possessing more education than most in the army. Due to its great writing, organization, and inclusion of supplementary material, A. O. Marshall's memoir is a must-read for Civil War students, scholars, and general readers.

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

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

Citation: Daniel Sauerwein. Review of Marshall, Albert O., *Army Life: From a Soldier's Journal: Incidents, Sketches, and Record of a Union Soldier's Army Life, in Camp and Field, 1861-1864*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. January, 2011.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32204>



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