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Donald R. Jermann. *Civil War Battlefield Orders Gone Awry: The Written Word and Its Consequences in 13 Engagements.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012. vii + 208 pages. $45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6949-9.

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In *Civil War Battlefield Orders Gone Awry: The Written Word and Its Consequences in 13 Engagements,* Donald R. Jermann explores "how 'writing' determined who won the war." His thesis, "The choice of but a few words or a single phrase could be the difference between victory and defeat" is demonstrated by presenting case studies illustrating how the choice of words influenced the outcome of battle (p. 1). The book, reminiscent of lectures on orders delivered by Major Eban Swift and Captain Joseph T. Dickman circa 1900 at the Fort Leavenworth School for Infantry and Cavalry, continues a longstanding tradition practiced at American military senior service schools of using historical military events to support instruction in the principles underlying armed conflict.[1] At its core, the work features a senior American officer applying American historical experience as well as troop-leading and staff procedures to expose American military principles and methodologies relating to battlefield orders.

Jermann writes from a strongly held, consistent point of view: "battlefield order writing was an art, and on the art, the outcome of the war hung in the balance" (p. 11). The stakes of battle are universally high and, when preparing orders, no distinction is made between strategic, operational, or tactical settings. Readers are provided a paradigm of "what a written battlefield order should contain" (pp. 6-7) and a discussion of the centrality of and risk inherent in granting discretion to subordinate commanders. These points are convincingly reinforced in thirteen case studies where subordinate actions foil the commander's intent, resulting in unfavorable battlefield outcomes. In a singular departure from emphasizing how orders can go wrong, Jermann argues that General Ulysses S. Grant's "crisp, clear, and unambiguous" language, often including the phrase "you will," was a favored word choice for orders because the expression "never left any doubt as to what the recipient was required to do" (p. 115). Collectively, Jermann's interpretations are properly seen as lessons intended to inform and provide a basis for preparing a battlefield order.

Jermann primarily relies on *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, and *Southern Historical Society Papers* as sources but curiously includes Wikipedia and popular-cum-enthusiast websites to document biographical material for luminaries such as the generals Don Carlos Buell, Leonidas Polk, John Schofield, and Philip Sheridan. Unfortunately, the modest notes and bibliography are marred by an erroneous and confusing entry citing Major General Isaac Trimble's account of events supporting the Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill Battle of Gettysburg narrative (see p. 133, p. 200, n. 6, and Trimble bibliographic entry on p. 204). The citation omits the article title, instead referring to two periodicals, both of which published articles authored by Trimble, and incorrectly reports volume and page numbers referencing a Gettysburg campaign article by another author.[2]

Readers who are military professionals, provide leadership instruction to soldiers, or those otherwise interested in investigating how orders are formulated will find much to like and admire in this work. The author, in addition to applying military history to teach the practical lessons of staff work, maintains a strongly stated, consistent message and methodology to provide material ready-made for use by instructors and students concerned with order writing. Jermann masterfully applies modern staff procedures to provide succinct summary description and analysis of the military situation for each engagement, the purpose of which is the production of a properly worded, unambiguous order that takes into consideration all of the important factors at hand. In each case study, Jermann walks readers through analyzing the higher commander's mission, the opposed forces, terrain, weather, time, and the personal characteristics of the key

commanders. The engagement narrative and subsequent discussion emphasizes how events did not unfold as intended and identifies causes rooted in the historical order. A revised order is offered that might have changed events, and hammers home the importance of words to events. Each chapter can be interpreted as a professional military education war game problem complete with an approved solution. Perhaps the best indication of Jermann's skill is the brevity of his work. For example, the Gettysburg campaign is discussed in just fourteen pages. The entire body of the book's text, covering all thirteen engagements, extends to only 196 pages.

Academic historians will find the book disappointing because in it historical complexity is arguably oversimplified and discussion focuses almost exclusively on a single topic: order writing as a professional military skill. The historical narratives, discussions, and interpretations of each engagement are necessarily monocausal in tone. Jermann acknowledges this weakness by writing in the introduction to the Battle of Spring Hill, "Our subject is battlefield order writing and, admittedly, battlefield order writing was not the sole cause or even the main cause [of events]. However, it did play a significant role and we will concentrate on this aspect" (p.152). Unfortunately, such focus leads to overstatement and counterfactual speculations, exemplified by the concluding sentences discussing the Battle of Perryville: "The Confederates had come close to winning and winning big at Perryville.... Had they won a major victory, they might have won the campaign. Had they won the campaign ... they might have won foreign recognition. Had they won foreign recognition, they might have won their independence. It all came down to words" (p. 97). Academic military historians will inescapably conclude that *Civil War Orders Gone Awry* violates the spirit of historical objectivity and does not adhere to the highest scholarly standards.

Rather than teach military history or employ historical method, what Jermann actually does, and intends readers to do, is use military history to investigate and discuss a military skill. He deftly applies history-as-illustration to draw lessons from specific historical events relating to the art of preparing orders. As a result, readers are vicariously exposed to a large spectrum of historical experiences demonstrating the unintended consequences, and importance, of language used in battlefield orders, without the necessity of becoming period experts. In this effort, Jermann succeeds brilliantly and rejection of the book on exclusively academic grounds is arguably inappropriate. Although *Civil War Orders Gone Awry* cannot be recommended for scholarly audiences because of its flaws, it is recommended for addition to any military science practitioner's bookshelf because it is an accessible and effective vehicle for exploring how battlefield orders are prepared, a key skill for the professional soldier.

Notes

[1]. These and other lectures related to preparing orders can be found at the Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) website under Staff Work, "Infantry and Cavalry School Lectures 1898-1910," CARL, United States Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/resources/archival/lectures.asp (accessed January 9, 2013).

[2]. Trimble's account appears in at least two sources: Isaac Trimble, "The Battle and Campaign of Gettysburg," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 26 (1898): 116-128. Available online at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Southern_Historical_Society_Papers_v (accessed December 4, 2012); and Isaac Trimble, "The Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg," *Confederate Veteran* 25 (1917): 209-213. Available online in several formats at http://archive.org/details/confederateveter25conf (accessed January 9, 2013). The Jermann volume and page number reference Randolph H. McKim, "The Gettysburg Campaign," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 40 (1915): 253-300. McKim's recollection of Trimble's urgent exhortation and behavior appears at the place cited (p. 273). Available online at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Southern_Historical_Society_Papers_v (accessed January 9, 2013).

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