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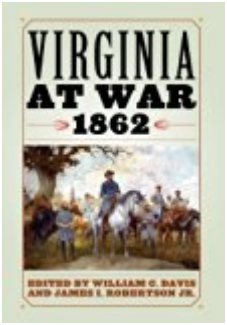
William C. Davis, James I. Robertson Jr., eds.. *Virginia at War: 1862.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007. x + 248 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-2428-5.



Reviewed by Gregory L. Wade

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Works about Virginia as a Civil War battlefield are certainly plentiful with new volumes being released seemingly everyday. But on the home front, what the citizens were thinking, feeling, and enduring remains a topic still not fully explored. *Virginia at War: 1862*, provides the reader valuable insight into Virginia life as the reality of full war unfolded on the citizenry.

In this varied collection of topical essays, edited by historians William C. Davis and James I. Robertson, we are introduced to the chaos of war while the two sides fought for control of Virginia. Starting with details about the political front and early euphoria from the South's victories in the Seven Days campaign, writer John Salmon contrasts the early leadership of the two sides. He writes in, "Land Operations in Virginia in 1862," "the Confederate government and people sang [Confederate General Robert E. Lee] Lee's praises as they rejoiced over their deliverance and treated the thousands of wounded flooding the city. As Southern morale soared, Northern confidence plummeted at first as the public absorbed the news of [Union General George McClellan] McClellan's defeat" (p. 11). McClellan would not be the last Union commander to be bettered by Lee.

John G. Selby's, "Virginia's Civilians at War in 1862," describes the horror as casualty lists made their way to the home front. He writes of the condition of slaves who found themselves in the vice of the combating sides, "the treatment of the escaped slave ran the gamut from paternalistic to patently cruel" (p. 40).

By September 1862, General McClellan was back in command of the Army of the Potomac resulting from fellow Gen. John Pope's debacle at Second Manassas. This was also a particularly trying time for General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia as they mended from the ravages of a rapidly expanding war. Having lost at least one fourth of his army in the Maryland fields of Antietam, Lee needed a plan. In his essay, "Lee Rebuilds His Army," Dennis Frye surmises that, while Lee had retreated back into Virginia, the general did not regard himself as defeated. "He deemed the move from Antietam as a redeployment, not as a conclusion to the Maryland campaign" (p. 140). While Lee certainly had aggressive

goals, his army was suffering from the constant stress and simply put, "Lee's army was tired" (p. 144).

No matter how well disciplined, war brings out the worst in men under tremendous pressure, and conditions in Virginia were no exception. Thomas Lowery's, "The Trials of Military Occupation," describes the progressive nature of crime against civilians as the war grinds on and makes compelling reading. Always one of the biggest consequences of the lowest level of man's cruelty, rape would become all too common. Women, both free and slave, were often not safe, and it was not just occupying Union troops committing these acts. Lowry notes, "recorded cases are few, since virtually all southern court-martial records were lost in the war, but a few references survive, enough to know that rape did happen to white women and to blacks alike" (p. 65).

All the essays provide insight into circumstances foreign to many contemporary readers. Harold Wilson discusses Virginia's Industry during 1862 and David J. Cole's, "Richmond the Confederate Hospital City," describes the mammoth task of maintaining some semblance of order in the so called "medical facilities" of the day. Administrators and hospital personnel did what they could, and in some ways were incredibly efficient with what they had to work with. Women were pressed into new roles. That topic alone could have provided a volume of interesting reading as women working in prisons and hospitals full of wounded men was a radical idea in 1862 and was not looked at favorably by many.

It is also difficult for twenty-first century readers to separate themselves from our world of the internet, cell phones, and text messaging to venture back to the communication resources of the 1860s. Basically, those behind the lines received their information through lithograph and print. That, along with rumor and complete untruths, helped both sides quickly realize how propaganda could work to aid their cause or create serious dissension. But printing materials such as paper were needed before either could be done. Harold Holzer in, "Virginians See Their War," aptly describes the challenges facing those covering the War to procure even the most basic materials.

The casual reader of Civil War history generally assumes the Southern states were a solid block of confederate patriotism, and that should especially have been true of Virginia. ***Virginia at War*** explores this myth. Brian Steel Wills's essay, "Virginia's Troubled Interior," notes the mix of loyalties in a state as large and diverse as the Old Dominion state. He writes, "Southern sympathy vied with Unionism for supremacy in the hearts and minds of many southwest Virginians" (p. 123). While many works on the "lost cause" have engendered the idea that the South was a solid and united front against their northern enemy, this discussion about the mindset behind the lines is a microcosm of the entire south. And just one year made a big difference for the populace. Wills notes that instead of eastern Kentucky being held in Southern hands, which would have fortified Southwest Virginia, Union incursions of various sizes made Virginians in the area miserable. "Infighting and recrimination were the order of the day for the southerners" (p. 133). And while the major engagements such as the Seven Days Campaign and Fredericksburg made the national headlines, other parts of the state suffered in different ways. Additionally Wills explores bushwacking, poverty, and disease brought on by the war in the back country of Virginia.

The first person narrative of Judith Brachenbrough McGuire, "Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War, January-July 1862," is peppered with period descriptions expounding on the trials of civilians uprooted by war. This account, edited by James Robertson, tells of news that led the populace into times of despair as well as optimism. On February 27, 1862, she writes of the Confederate loss at Fort Donelson. Later, on March 11 she writes, "the ship Virginia, formerly the Merrimac

... steamed out in to Hampton Roads, ran into the Federal vessel Cumberland, and then destroyed the Congress, and ran the Minnesota ashore.... We have heard nothing further; but this is glory enough for one day, for which we will thank God and take courage." Only a few months later in May she recorded, "Oh, how forsaken and forlorn we are" (p. 202)!

Virginia at War: 1862 brings under the cover of one volume a wide variety of wartime topics. Not getting caught up in too much detail, it enables the reader to understand the wide variety of circumstances a citizen of that state would have found themselves in. And while Virginia is considered the key battleground for the Civil War, it is, by no means, alone in the turmoil and horror of life behind the lines. The book may have been more complete had it noted and made comparisons with other states in similar circumstances.

The book is well sourced and the endnotes explain additional facts well. Unfortunately, the text has no maps which would be very helpful, especially for the reader seeking a general overview of Virginia's military condition in 1862. These would have been particularly pertinent to the discussion of the various regions of Virginia and the propensity of the residents to be either Union or Southern sympathizers.

As a collection of essays covering a wide variety of topics, this volume makes a nice contribution to early war literature. The essayists open the door for future study of such topics as the harshness of war time crime, the role of women in nontraditional duties, and the complexity of the race issues in Virginia. Perhaps similar works could be written regarding other key battleground states in the South.

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