

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Robert Grandchamp. *Colonel Edward E. Cross, New Hampshire Fighting Fifth: A Civil War Biography.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013. xi + 217 pages. \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-7191-1.

Reviewed by Keith Altavilla (Texas Christian University)

Published on H-War (September, 2013)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Printer, Democrat, Soldier

The Civil War is filled with fascinating characters, many of whom demonstrated great skill and bravery, only to see their careers cut short by an untimely death, intractable political foes, or significant personal flaws. Edward Everett Cross of New Hampshire was such a man, and Robert Grandchamp's biography of the colonel opens a window in the complex world of Civil War politics and promotion. Generally regarded as an unpleasant character who drove his regiment with threats of violence, Grandchamp looks here to rehabilitate Cross's legacy, and uses the divisive and complex politics of the nineteenth century to help explain the colonel's controversial life and memory.

Born and raised in New Hampshire, Edward Cross was a restless man. His grandfather Richard Everett had defended West Point during the Revolution before becoming a prominent New Hampshire attorney, and his father Ephraim was an active businessman in Coos County. Young Edward joined the local militia, but his true formative experiences came with the *Coos County Democrat* newspaper, including the beginning of a life-long friendship with Henry O. Kent. Moving to Manchester, he earned a reputation for being short-tempered, which culminated into a physical brawl with Charles Farrar Browne. Finding little left for him to do in New Hampshire, Cross struck out for locations farther west. Grandchamp identifies this wanderlust as a persistent feature of Cross's life, and his first stop was Cincin-

nati. There Cross further developed as a journalist for the *Cincinnati Times*, where he reported on national politics. Grandchamp describes Cross as sympathetic to nativism, and a supporter of the American Party through 1856. From 1852 to 1858, Cross worked in Washington as a political reporter, and used his position to regularly excoriate the abolitionist policies of New Hampshire senator John Parker Hale. The American Party's embarrassing 1856 defeat pushed Cross to the Democratic Party, though not without reservations over its stronger states-rights position.

Cross's penchant for moving westward took him even farther than Cincinnati, to the Arizona Territory with the Santa Rita Mining Company. There, Cross founded the *Weekly Arizonian*, the territory's first newspaper, in the mining settlement of Tubac. In addition to discussing events of local importance and commenting on national matters, Cross used his paper to promote settlement and further resource exploration in the Territory. Cross saw many of his assertions challenged by Sylvester Mowry in Washington, though both were attempting to promote settlement in the territory. Cross's short-tempered responses to Mowry provoked a celebrated duel in Tubac, which ended without any injury. News of the duel spread throughout the nation, and brought some celebrity to Cross. Cross later volunteered for local militia duty to protect the settlers from Apache raids. One such raid saw the destruction of Tubac, in-

cluding Cross's home and much of his papers. His letters to Henry Kent, in fact, provide much of Grandchamp's sources for the pre-Civil War aspects of Cross's life.

Grandchamp's analysis picks up considerably with the Civil War's outbreak. Cross returned home to his beloved New Hampshire in order to raise a regiment for the protection of the Union. He received a commission to lead the Fifth New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry, and set about making the "Fighting Fifth" one of the eastern theater's best. Using his experiences in the militia and fighting Apaches, Cross molded the Fifth into a disciplined unit well suited to the kind of war the nation was facing. Grandchamp skillfully weaves in Cross's hypocrisy on this discipline, as the colonel himself had more than a little fondness for the drink and other vices. While not particularly noteworthy in the context of Civil War officers, Cross's inability to abide by the same personal discipline that he imposed on his own men made him less than popular. The Fifth served with distinction at Fair Oaks and Fredericksburg, but their finest moment came at Antietam, when Cross had them smear their faces with gunpowder and charge near the Sunken Road, a stunning small-scale victory in the battle's carnage.

Though the Fifth New Hampshire's record was exemplary, and reports of Cross's bravery were backed by his corps commander Winfield Scott Hancock, the colonel found his application for further promotion blocked. At first, much of this came from his long record of antagonizing New Hampshire's Republicans, who held power in the state and had the ear of Republican president Abraham Lincoln. Most prominently, these included John Parker Hale. Cross needed to placate the Republicans in his state, and in 1863 made an appearance at the state convention to give a history of the regiment to encourage recruitment and promote the Union. He even secured a meeting with President Lincoln to plead his case for a promotion, which appeared to have gone well, at least in Cross's mind, but he was again denied. Grandchamp holds back from discussing Lincoln's motivations for refusal, suggesting bureaucratic sloppiness, but Cross himself blamed his politics, particularly when several abolitionist officers he had previously castigated received sim-

ilar promotions. Grandchamp's narrative of the struggle for promotion does reveal a number of interesting facets of the process of promoting officers in the Union army, one that sheds additional light on the difficulty of sorting between promotions based on merit, and on politics.

Cross's failure to earn that final promotion forms a poignant backdrop to the end of his life. He took several injuries during the war, at Fair Oaks and Marye's Heights, each time appearing to cheat death. Cross himself was obsessed with the possibility, and regularly went into battle predicting that the end was near, and never with greater clarity than on the eve of Gettysburg. Grandchamp does suggest that this could be an overstatement, and that Cross's statement that this would be his final battle just as likely meant that he was considering resigning in the face of his rejected promotion. Making what Grandchamp calls the only mistake of his Civil War career, Cross led the Fifth into the Wheatfield and received a fatal wound from a sharpshooter on the evening of the second day, finally expiring that night. Grandchamp's narrative moves on from there to discuss Cross's legacy. Since the book's publication, some Cross supporters have sought to see him awarded the rank of brevet major general, whether through the regular army or state militia, though their efforts have as of yet gone wanting. Mourned by his men and many other politicians in the state, his name appears on the Fighting Fifth's monument at Gettysburg. To of Cross's style, Grandchamp also includes his short story "The Young Volunteers," written in 1854 under the pen name Richard Everett. The volunteers of Cross's story are much like Cross himself: brave citizen-soldiers with a taste for adventure heading to Mexico to fight for their country.

Robert Grandchamp attempts to give a full accounting of Cross's complex life. His various professions led him to the opportunity for great heroism during the Civil War. The character traits that led to that position, though, also served to prevent his rise. The extensive record of political opinions left by Cross provides a window into his persona, and suggests why an otherwise exemplary officer received little recognition during his lifetime.

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

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

Citation: Keith Altavilla. Review of Grandchamp, Robert, *Colonel Edward E. Cross, New Hampshire Fighting Fifth: A Civil War Biography*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. September, 2013.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38093>



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