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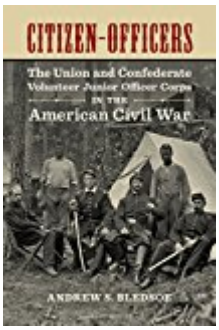

Andrew S. Bledsoe. *Citizen-Officers: The Union and Confederate Volunteer Junior Officer Corps in the American Civil War.* Conflicting Worlds: New Dimensions of the American Civil War Series. Baton Rouge: Lousiana State University Press, 2015. 352 pp. $47.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-6070-1.

Reviewed by Jack Furniss

Published on H-War (November, 2016)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

On the eve of the Civil War, the regular United States Army contained 1,100 officers, several hundred of whom would eventually resign their commissions to join the Confederacy. Such numbers sufficed for a peacetime force of 16,000 but left an immense deficit in leadership when four million men donned blue or grey uniforms during the next four years. This gap could only be filled by appointing thousands of men as officers who generally had no more military experience than those they commanded. As Andrew S. Bledsoe explains in his deeply researched and compelling study, historians have taught us much about the common citizen-soldier, but little about these "citizen-officers" as a collective. Brimming with primary testimony and quantitative data, *Citizen-Officers* provides the first sustained examination of the ideology, culture, and wartime experience of volunteer officers on both sides of the sectional divide.

Bledsoe grounds *Citizen-Officers* in relevant scholarship without letting historiographical jousting detract from the neglected history he wants to tell. While works detailing soldiers' perspectives on race, gender, loyalty, and party politics appear, studies examining soldier motivation by, among others, James McPherson, Lorien Foote, and Gerald Lindermann figure more centrally. The findings of these historians are generally incorporated rather than challenged, but while Lindermann has strongly stressed Victorian values, particularly courage, as explaining soldier conduct, it is clear that Bledsoe sees his officers driven primarily by their adherence to a citizen-soldier ethos rooted in republican ideology. As Bledsoe acknowledges, other scholars have looked at volunteer officers before, and highlighted some of the same themes, but Bledsoe adds much to our understanding by treating them as a distinct subset of both armies with their own unique culture and experiences. At a time when the vast majority of scholarship expounds the profound differences between North and South, Bledsoe also provides a reminder that powerful continuities endured, at least in elements of military culture and experience.

Bledsoe opens with a condensed history of the citizen-soldier ideal from Cincinnatus to the Civil War. Volunteers had performed poorly in every war but remained the popular ideal due to the revulsion of standing armies embodied in republicanism and Jacksonian Democracy. This is familiar ground for anyone conversant with US military history but Bledsoe succinctly recounts it to trace the lineage of the book's core theme: the persistent clash "between antebellum democratic values and the demands of military necessity" (p. xii). As future Union Major General George Gordon Meade complained during the US-Mexican War, volunteer officers exhibited "no command over their men" since they knew that at the end of their service "these men will be their equals" (p. 19). Democracy, it turned out, did not lend itself to efficiency.

During the Civil War, citizen-officers were either chosen by election from among the volunteers, producing "popularity contests, corruption, and outright demagoguery," or appointed through political patronage. Some societal deference clearly lingered among the wartime generation as both armies chose officers who were older and richer, and possessed greater status in civilian life than the average soldier. This was especially true of the Confederacy, where 40 percent of officers came from slaveholding families, compared to 25 percent of the entire Confederate army. While elections granted officers some legitimacy, militarily they remained entirely green. To address this problem, both armies soon adopted systems of examination for volunteer officers in an attempt to wed competency to democracy.

Learning the basics of drill aided officers only minimally in their most daunting task: converting theoretical authority into inspiring leadership. Bledsoe offers illustrative vignettes of officers' varying success in winning over their charges. Pennsylvanian Samuel Craig confided to his diary that, in order to exude confidence when conducting drill, he "would slip away to some distant secluded spot, and there by myself practice my voice in giving commands ... to the surrounding stumps and the trees" (p. 85). Levi Duff recounted how his commander lost all respect after "he had the impudence," when drilling his men in the rain, "to wear an India rubber coat ... that the privates could not afford" (p. 96). Attempting to simultaneously display authority and social parity constituted an unenviable task.

Existing in the chasm between free-spirited citizen-soldiers and the regular army, citizen-officers went through a process of "regularization" that helped them construct their own "unique interior culture" (pp. 105, 102). Retaining a democratic civilian ethos, officers nonetheless tried to reflect the professional standards of the regular army and engender them in the volunteers. Army camps offered endless opportunities for indulgence and excess, undermining military preparedness. The officer able to exhibit moderation and infuse a "culture of moral excellence" within his unit could promote cohesion and attract loyalty (p. 112). Officers' distinctive uniforms and swords sometimes drew ridicule from volunteers who saw them as elitist trappings, but they held great "emotional and symbolic meaning for the men who wore them into battle" (p. 133).

The book's final chapters deal with the experience and consequences of combat. Career progression ended rapidly for any officer who showed cowardice (and many did), but Bledsoe insists that "a brave officer was far less important to his men than a good officer who stayed alive" (p. 148). Chastened by combat, men increasingly valued discipline in battle but never accepted "broader military discipline" in camp and on the march (p. 193). By 1864, units operated with greater harmony and efficiency, but volunteer officers continued to be killed in disproportionate numbers. As Bledsoe's analysis reveals, Union and Confederate junior officers suffered 43 percent and 47 percent casualty rates respectively, compared to 16 percent and 31 percent for all soldiers

(pp. 161-162). Even for those officers who emerged physically unscathed, psychologically the Civil War was still a "fundamentally damaging experience" (p. 180).

While Bledsoe's evaluations of officers occasionally appear overly heroic, he nonetheless manages to make his generally sympathetic portrayal convincing. Consistently, Bledsoe credits men with having found "creative, often ingenious solutions" to overcome "unique leadership challenges" (p. xii). This appraisal sometimes strains against evidence showing men who failed spectacularly due to some combination of cowardice, incompetence, or indifference. But, in the end, it is the abundance of counterexamples that paint a convincing picture of fallible human beings who, in the context of the immense challenges they faced, "fulfilled their duty with great distinction" (p. 71).

Bledsoe has filled a significant gap in our knowledge of Civil War armies. While *Citizen-Officers* is likely to appeal primarily to Civil War military historians or to enthusiastic general readers, it will richly reward anyone interested in the long development of the United States' armed forces or the profoundly personal experiences of soldiering in an era of predominantly volunteer armies.