

Steven E. Woodworth, Charles D. Grear, ed. *Vicksburg Besieged*. Civil War Campaigns in the West Series. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2020. Illustrations, maps. 200 pp. \$29.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8093-3783-5.

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The latest volume in the Civil War Campaigns in the West series from Southern Illinois University Press continues the exploration of the great Vicksburg campaign and focuses specifically on the actual siege. Editors Steven E. Woodworth and Charles D. Grear have assembled an impressive group of historians who bring a wide array of professional perspectives to the project, including university faculty, park rangers, and professional battlefield guides. That intellectual diversity is on full display in this fine, brief volume that examines one of the most important events of the entire American Civil War. Grear's exceedingly brief introduction quickly summarizes the previous events of the campaign, provides a standard summary of the overall significance of Vicksburg, and contextualizes the subsequent chapters.

Andrew Bledsoe's opening essay is easily the volume's strongest contribution and among its most original. Author of the excellent monograph *Citizen-Officers: The Union and Confederate Volunteer Junior Officer Corps in the American Civil War, 1861-1865* (2015), Bledsoe profiles the officers, chronicles contemporary perceptions of them, and expertly analyzes the relationships between Ulysses S. Grant and his command staff during the siege of the great Confederate stronghold. Predictably, Grant emerges as the deter-

mined and adaptable shining star surrounded by primarily mediocre officers who generally turned in "tepid performances that had no great impact on the campaign's operational objectives" (p. 23). Still, according to Bledsoe, under the great general's leadership, those unexceptional subordinates "nevertheless demonstrated flashes of proficiency" (p. 23).

The other standout selection is Jonathan Steplyk's chapter, which examines the role of Union and Confederate sharpshooters and, more interestingly, chronicles and analyzes combatants' opinions of that controversial concept. Author of the groundbreaking monograph *Fighting Means Killing: Civil War Soldiers and the Nature of Combat* (2018), Steplyk expertly explains the important role played by sharpshooters on both sides, their relatively small numbers notwithstanding, and deftly demonstrates that despite the popular impression that Civil War soldiers loathed the practice, many understood the necessity of sharpshooting and respected the role played by such skilled marksmen to devastating effect.

Readers interested in tactics will find much of interest in Justin Solonick's excellent essay that examines Federal efforts to deploy mines under Confederate defensive lines. Although much of the essay focuses on the efforts of Captain Andrew J.

Hickenlooper, Solonick provides a wealth of information about the state of military engineering knowledge, meticulously explains techniques employed by Union forces, and carefully explicates Confederate countermeasures. Solonick's expert analysis extends even to a discussion of the weight of charges necessary based on the type of soil present. Serious students of Civil War military history and of the Vicksburg campaign specifically will appreciate this fine essay.

Other chapters include a brief description of the dangers of nighttime for both civilians and soldiers during the siege, a broader discussion of the civilian experience, a summary of trans-Mississippi Confederates' reactions to the fall of Vicksburg, the story of musicians during part of the campaign, and an examination of African American soldiers' contributions to Federal efforts.

The authors are to be commended for the even quality of the essays, a feat rarely achieved

in anthologies, and editors Woodworth and Gear deserve congratulations for the lack of repetition throughout the essays. The overall organization is logical, and the collective result is a readable assemblage of chapters that flow together seamlessly. Interestingly, the dangers and opportunities presented by fraternization between Union and Confederate soldiers appears as a common thread in multiple essays. As with the previous volumes in the series, *Vicksburg Besieged* targets readers who possess a working knowledge of the campaign and an interest keen enough to absorb essays on specific facets of the operations. Still, for that audience, the book offers a commendable range of coverage that addresses the perspectives of officers and common soldiers, African American troops, and civilians in the siege and even west of the Mississippi River. This is an admirable collection recommended for any Civil War historian with a strong interest in the western theater.

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