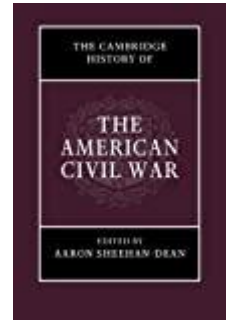


**Aaron Charles Sheehan-Dean.** *The Cambridge History of the American Civil War: Volume 1, Military Affairs.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 642 pp. \$158.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-14889-5.



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## Dilday on Sheehan-Dean

Edited by renowned Civil War historian Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Louisiana State University), *Volume 1: Military Affairs* is part of the three-volume *Cambridge History of the American Civil War*. It presents the military aspects of the war across eighteen narrative chapters focusing on the major battles and campaigns along with nine additional chapters on the geographic areas of conflict, such as rivers, the border region, and Appalachia. Each chapter includes at least one accompanying map. The list of authors includes a litany of esteemed Civil War scholars well suited to the task of retelling the military history of the Civil War. For instance, Gordon C. Rhea, author of five books on the 1864 battles in Virginia, was the clear choice to write “The Overland Campaign.” And, who better to write “The Battles of Tennessee, 1862,” than Timothy B. Smith, whose previous books include *Corinth 1862: Siege, Battle, Occupation* (2012), *Grant Invades Tennessee: The 1862*

*Battles for Forts Henry and Donelson* (2016), and *Shiloh: Conquer or Perish* (2014)?

In this volume, the editor took an extremely narrow view of the Civil War, with narratives stressing combat and “military encounters” (pp. 5-6). This outlook diverges from the current trend of a more holistic perspective, which both Civil War scholarship and the larger field of military history is moving toward. For instance, Lorien Foote and Earl J. Hess’s recent edited collection, *The Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War* (2021), takes a decidedly war-and-society approach to studying the conflict by integrating the military aspects with social and cultural history to achieve a more comprehensive perspective of the conflict. Sheehan-Dean even acknowledges this movement in his introduction when he states, “Scholars today are fortunate to live at a moment when we can incorporate various analytical approaches—cultural, social, economic, political, and military—into the histories we write and hope-

fully capture something of the capaciousness of life" (p. 2). Yet *Volume 1* curiously disregards such an integrated approach in its narratives. For example, both D. Scott Hartwig's chapter "The Antietam Campaign" and Christian B. Keller's chapter, "The Chancellorsville Campaign," aptly demonstrate the more traditional "drums-and-trumpet" approach to military history concentrating on generals, battles, and strategy.

This edited volume also features considerable variations in the styling of each chapter. For example, Kathryn J. Shively's chapter, "The Shenandoah Valley Campaigns of 1862 and 1864," shifts from the prototypical battle narrative to include sections on "civilians and occupation" and "post-war memory." The layout of each chapter also varies. Some chapters, like Carol Reardon's "The Gettysburg Campaign," is divided into sections with numbered headings while others, such as "The Petersburg and Appomattox Campaigns" by William Marvel, is written as a single, flowing narrative. The quality of the "Key Works" section at the end of each of the twenty-seven chapters also proves inconsistent as many of these do not reference a single work published in the previous decade. Furthermore, some chapters, like Kenneth W. Noe's "The Western Theater, 1862-1863," contain a plethora of footnotes offering insight into sources and other works that would benefit likely readers, while other authors barely include any footnotes at all.

Only a handful of the chapters mention any historiography. Glenn D. Brasher makes it a focus of "The Peninsula Campaign," noting the failure of much of the prevailing scholarship to acknowledge the campaign's contribution to emancipation. In "War in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas," Donald S. Frazier laments that the "uneven coverage in the Civil War literature belies the importance of these states to the outcome of the war and the crafting of the postbellum nation" (p. 538). Kevin Adams, in "War in the West," argues that "the Civil War in the West speaks to deeper con-

tinuities in nineteenth-century western history" (p. 558). Kevin Waite concludes "War in Indian Country"—the final chapter in *Volume 1*—with a call to the future of Civil War scholarship that "it is time to move past the old paradigms that quarantine slaves in the South and Indians in the West" (p. 598). Yet, outside of these four examples, no other chapters directly engage with other scholarship in their writing. The overall lack of historiography across the book is somewhat surprising given Sheehan-Dean's previous experience editing the excellent two-volume *A Companion to the U.S. Civil War* (2014), which remains a useful historiographical primer for the numerous subfields and ever-growing abundance of Civil War scholarship. With such a bevy of experts, this seems like a missed opportunity for volume 1 of the *Cambridge History of the American Civil War* to have been of greater benefit for novices to the field, those most likely to utilize this compendium.

In the end, perhaps the major downfall of this book is that it is prohibitively priced. At the time of writing this review, volume 1 of the *Cambridge History* retailed online for over 150 US dollars. This price point effectively means that no students—undergraduate or graduate—will purchase the work, nor will many early-career scholars. Additionally, creating a reference work at this price point could be construed as irresponsible given the austerities confronting most academic libraries, especially those that would benefit most from reference guides, like community colleges and small liberal arts schools. Given the cost and other shortcomings, introductory readers looking for their first foray into the Civil War may be better served by a classic like James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (1988) or, if they seek an emphasis on military conflict, a more recent work like Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh's *A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War* (2016). Overall, the individual efforts of each author are to be commended, but

the total value of this book is not greater than the sum of its parts.

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