

Soldiers North and South: The Everyday Experiences of the Men Who Fought America's Civil War

Paul A. Cimbala

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The American Civil War was an extraordinary event. It was a military, political, social, and constitutional milestone that shaped the nation's understanding of unity and freedom, if imperfectly, into the next century. No American war was so essential to defining what America was and should become. By exploring how and why Northern and Southern men rallied to their flags, trained to be soldiers, lived in camp, marched to the fight, endured combat, and dealt with the aftermath of battle, we can appreciate how such a grand drama of national scope touched the lives of individuals, especially when we pay attention to what those participants had to say about their experiences. Despite the hardships of camp life and the horror of battle, most of these men stayed on in the ranks to do a difficult job. They were not always eager combatants, but the most heroic of them swallowed hard, offered a prayer, overcame their fear, and charged into the enemy's guns. Importantly, their stories did not end with the final surrender of Confederate forces. The soldiers could not shake off their wartime experiences with the conclusion of combat. Thus, we also need to pay attention to their transition to peace and how they created the memories that they nurtured into their old age. Soldiers North and South is an attempt to understand why the men in the United States and Confederate armies made the sacrifices that they did and how fighting the war shaped their lives even as a reunited America tried to come to grips with its consequences.



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