

Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains

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Review

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Brinsfield, John W., William C. Davis, and Benedict Maryniak. *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains*. Stackpole Books, \$29.95 ISBN 811700178

Counting clergy

Scholars compile largest roster of War chaplains to date

Religion is often a taboo topic when discussing factual data or specific events in history. Being the realm of the metaphysical, faith is an elusive subject to grasp, to document, and to examine with the goal of specific outcomes. Popular and academic studies of the American Civil War have for the most part ignored the impact of religion. Yet during the Civil War, faith played a large role in the lives of soldiers, and their faith was shepherded by military chaplains. The men who became chaplains were as diverse as their flocks, coming from a variety of denominations, often married, following religious orders, and entering into the flood of War with little military experience. Their collective role as clergy was to lead religious services, comfort the sick, pray over the dead and dying, and counsel and comfort thousands of soldiers. Thankfully, **Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains** offers new insight to this aspect of the era.

This little volume is first and foremost, a roster of Union and Confederate chaplains. Through years of research, Brinsfield, Maryniak, and Robertson gathered data on 3,694 Civil War chaplains; this is the largest compiled list to date. As noted in the introduction, the men had been compiling rosters and researching chaplains separately for years, unaware of one another's work. Through a meeting at the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech, the men decided to merge their research into a combined roster. The roster itself offers the names of Union and Confederate chaplains, respectively, and lists birth and death dates, denominations, and the military unit or organization to which each chaplain was assigned.

Though the roster itself is a wonderful compilation, the authors chose to add two, introductory essays, *Union Military Chaplains* by Maryniak, and *Chaplains of the Confederacy* by Brinsfield. The essays describe the role and history of the chaplaincy during the War, and describe the impact that clergy had on the men in camp and on the battlefield. The essays are informative and poignant, as they include commentary from soldiers of the era, and narratives about chaplains who worked in hospitals, or took up arms and joined the ranks on the battlefield.

These initial essays are followed by a section entitled, *In their Own Words*, which contains an essay compiled of memoirs, letters, and diary excerpts from Confederate chaplains and a reprint of a Union chaplain's postwar address. The essay on Confederate chaplains portrays the experiences of chaplains from Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia, and reveals the first-person accounts of being on the battlefield, supporting the wounded in the aftermath, having to notify families, and balancing religious and political convictions. The Union essay is an original memoir of William R. Eastman, and provides a first-hand account of not only addressing the needs of the men in the field but also interfacing with other chaplains of various religious traditions. Not unlike his Confederate counterparts, Eastman's memories are both poignant and humorous, and describe a rarely seen portion of military life.

Faith in the Fight is both a military roster (and hence, a reference work) and a very readable history of Civil War chaplains. It includes a lengthy introduction, several illustrations, and endnotes with each essay. There are so few volumes on religion and the military during the Civil War, that this volume is destined to become a classic, alongside Gardiner H. Shattuck's *A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies*, and Steven E. Woodworth's *While God is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers*. And if there is any question regarding the scholarly research behind this work, one need only review the authors. John Brinsfield is a retired Army Chaplain from Atlanta, Georgia. William C. Davis is a professor of history and Director of Programs of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies. Benedict Maryniak is a researcher living in New York, and James I. Robertson, Jr. is an alumni distinguished professor of history. Robertson is also the Executive Director of The Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech, where the four authors first decided to merge their resources for this volume. **Faith in the Fight** is a valuable contribution to the little known religious life of the American soldier, and a tribute to the many men that provided their religious leadership to the armies, North and South.

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