

Cold Harbor to the Crater: The End of the Overland Campaign

Christian Keller

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Review

Keller, Christian

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Gallagher, Gary W. and Janney, Caroline E.. *Cold Harbor to the Crater: The End of the Overland Campaign*. University of North Carolina Press, \$35.00
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Fresh Perspectives on an Overlooked Portion of the Overland Campaign

At long last UNC Press's vaunted Military Campaigns of the Civil War series has returned under the careful co-editorship of Gary Gallagher and Caroline Janney. A well-written, well-researched, and topically comprehensive anthology of essays, the book is a fine addition to the scholarship on the Overland Campaign and the Siege of Petersburg, and worth the investment of time and money. Moreover, the essays are linked by several common themes that enhance the cohesion and readability of the volume. Advanced and beginning scholars and the informed general public will all gain by perusing its pages. It is not a book for the uninformed public reader. Keith Bohannon, Stephen Cushman, M. Keith Harris, Robert E. L. Krick, Kevin Levin, Kathryn Shively Meier, Gordon Rhea, and Joan Waugh wrote chapters along with the two co-editors.

A couple of preliminary observations are worth noting before delving into the meat of the ten essays. First, as was the case with the earlier volumes in the series, the book is a collection of independent essays that stand on their own but are connected by the common theme of the chronological span of the book, which covers the period from the advent of the operations around Cold Harbor at the end of May to the aftermath of the Battle of the Crater in early August, 1864. This is a tidy yet historically momentous period of time that nicely bookends the work in between the deeply-researched previous battles of the Overland Campaign—Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and North Anna—and the heart of the Petersburg Siege, which has also received a good deal of scholarly attention in recent years. It would be too much to claim that Gallagher and Janney found a "historiographic hole" to exploit, as other authors such as William Matter,

Gordon Rhea, Noah Trudeau, and Ernest Furgurson have written fine histories of these final months of the Overland Campaign, but the uniqueness of linking the end of that operation with the beginning of the Petersburg Campaign using a variety of scholarly sub-themes is novel and refreshing. The private soldier's experience, military leadership, civilian perception of events, the primacy of logistics, and racial tensions all present themselves in multiple essays. Perhaps most noticeable, however, is the recurrent (and, from this reviewer's perspective, dominant) theme of combat in the trenches, which befits the title of the book and reflects the reality of the unrelenting war in the East in the early summer of 1864. The bloody Federal assault of June 3 at Cold Harbor is treated to some degree in almost half of the chapters, and itself serves as a subtheme.

Second, the anthology clearly reflects the triumph of the "new military history" in Civil War scholarship. The blending of social, cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender-based approaches to historical analysis with the time-honored, traditional focus on military and political leadership, battles, and campaigns has been at work since the late 1970s, but in few essay collections published in the last decade has the fusion been so apparent—and so successful. Some readers who prefer the classic treatment of generalship and warfare may initially be frustrated by the inclusion of Stephen Cushman's essay, "The Battle of the Crater in Recent Fiction," for instance, but after reading it they should change their opinion. As is the case with some of the other chapters, it offers new ways of critically thinking about a well-worn historical event that broaden our understanding of how that historical event transpired, was remembered, or perhaps misperceived over time. Increasingly, as the recent furor over the Confederate flag has demonstrated, how an historical event is *perceived* is as important as what actually happened, an argument made by Gary Gallagher, Keith Harris, and Kevin Levin in their essays.

The ten chapters move forward in a loose chronological fashion, following an able introduction by Gallagher and Janney and preceding a useful bibliographic essay at the end. Like previous volumes in the series, the book does not attempt to address every possible topic of significance during the time period it covers, but experienced readers will be hard-pressed to find worthy subjects that were not mentioned, at least indirectly, somewhere in the essays. Also similar to the series' previous installments, *Cold Harbor to the Crater* includes essays that evaluate public sentiments (Gary Gallagher's analysis of the image of Grant and Lee in the armies and at home); are biographical in nature (Joan Waugh's contribution on Francis C. Barlow); examine the plight of

civilians in wartime (Janney's chapter on civilians in wartime Petersburg); highlight the common soldier's experience (Kathryn Shively Meier's piece on "Enduring Cold Harbor"); and analyze the role of logistics (Keith Bohannon's essay on Confederate engineers and field fortifications and Gordon Rhea's "Grant's Disengagement from Cold Harbor"). By following a formula that has worked admirably in the past, Gallagher and Janney succeed in presenting a book that upholds the high standards of the series' earlier titles while offering room for expanded interpretative approaches (as exemplified by Kevin Levin's piece on black troops at the Crater) and inspiration for further research.

All of the essays are engagingly written and shed light on previously unknown or little-used primary sources. Janney's essay in particular is a model of good historical writing. Yet Robert E. L. Krick's examination of the new regiments and brigades that joined Lee's army in the late spring of 1864 is especially masterful in its command of archival sources and truly offers much new information on these units and their commanders, such as the 4th, 5th, and 6th South Carolina cavalries and the 2nd, 4th, and 6th Florida battalions. His chapter transports us deep into the contested thickets around Cold Harbor as well as into the thoughts of the rookie soldiers and officers. Krick has always had a penchant for blending imagery-filled prose with exhaustive historical research, and this latest contribution upholds his well-earned reputation. Also striking for its deeply-layered documentation and new information is Keith Bohannon's analysis of the Confederate engineering corps and associated officers during the overall Overland Campaign. His chapter may prompt readers to think anew about the southern debacle at the Mule Shoe at Spotsylvania and the arrangement of the rebel trench lines at Cold Harbor and how strongly they affected the course of events.

The essays that require topographic awareness to better understand the authors' arguments, such as Bohannon's, Rhea's, and Janney's, are equipped with clear, easy-to-follow maps. Numerous pertinent illustrations, drawn mainly from the Library of Congress's vast photographic and sketch collections, add flavor and provide a human face to the individuals discussed in the text. Some of the images seem to have been published for the first time, which is always a drawing card.

Gallagher and Janney have compiled a very fine anthology on a lesser-known and -researched period of the war in the East. UNC Press should be pleased with this reboot of the vaunted Military Campaigns series. Readers will

be pleased with its content, scholarship, and prose.

Dr. Keller is professor of history in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, PA, and teaches courses on the theory of war and strategy, national security policy, and Civil War history. Among other books and articles, he is author of Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory (Fordham, 2007); co-author of Pennsylvania: A Military History (Westholme, 2016 forthcoming); and author of The Great Partnership: Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Confederate Strategy in the East (UNC Press, in progress).