

### Battle: The Nature and Consequences of Civil War Combat

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## Review

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**Gramm, Kent, ed.** *Battle: The Nature and Consequences of Civil War Combat*. University of Alabama Press, \$32.50 hardcover ISBN 9780817316228

### Defining the Nature of Combat

Like many scholars who study the culture impact of wartime violence, I will never forget the first time I read John Keegan's groundbreaking *The Face of Battle* or Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*. The books were not only eye-opening, they were revelations. In *Battle: The Nature and Consequences of Civil War Combat*, Kent Gramm has assembled an outstanding group of authors that have produced a marvelous collection of essays on nineteenth century combat that is a welcome American Civil War companion to Keegan and Fussell's classics. Most of these essays were originally presented at a symposium for the Seminary Ridge Historical Preservation Foundation at Gettysburg but have been revised and expanded for publication. Some will find these essays disturbing in their graphic content, but as General William T. Sherman noted "war is about fighting and fighting is about killing."

Paul Fussell's opening essay sets out an ambitious goal: to define the culture of war. The culture of war for Fussell is "dominated by fear, blood and sadism," and primarily "by irrational actions." For Fussell the culture of war in the U.S. has led the American government time and again to censor the public's knowledge of this irrationality in order to promote bellicose policies and the image of war as rationale endeavor. D. Scott Hartwig's essay on the face of battle for Gettysburg is the ideal place for a novice Gettysburg visitor to begin their reading. This concise essay investigates the daily drudgery of soldiery, the dehydration, hunger, and exhaustion from long marches as well as the experience of fighting from the perspective of artillery, infantry and cavalry branches of the service. Bruce A. Evans offers a fast-paced overview of medical care and treatment simultaneously busting myths while offering new insight. The history of Civil War medicine has always been a complex world that many

historians prefer to leave to physicians. By discussing not only the organization of the medical care system but also the treatment for common types of disease and wounds, Evans makes the subject both accessible to the average reader and critical for the serious scholar. Drawing from his provocative book *Shook Over Hell* (1997) on post-traumatic stress, Eric T. Dean offers historians a powerful analysis of the effects of combat on the minds of soldiers. While Alan Nolan explains the cultural significance of Civil War combat in helping to launch the postwar Lost Cause mythology, which portrayed a united Confederacy whose invincible armies were overwhelmed by superior resources but whose soldiers' gallantry was unmatched. Kent Gramm's own original contribution "Numbers" offers some interesting tidbits for those of you looking for something to spice up your survey lectures covering the Civil War period.

Professors who are seeking an antidote to their Civil War undergraduate student's romantic views of combat will find this volume an excellent classroom tool. Hartwig's piece alone would have made the volume an important contribution and taken as a whole the authors offer an important tutorial on the meaning and impact of Civil War combat.

*Barton A. Myers is currently Harry Frank Guggenheim Dissertation Fellow and doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia where he is writing a dissertation that examines the intersection of hardcore Unionism, guerrilla violence and military policy statewide in Civil War North Carolina. His first book Executing Daniel Bright: Military Incursion, Racial Conflict and Guerrilla Violence in a Coastal Carolina Community during the Civil War is forthcoming from LSU Press.*