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A Citizen-Soldier's Civil War: The Letters of Brevet Major
General Alvin C. Voris (review)

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A Citizen-Soldier's Civil War: The Letters of Brevet Major General Alvin C. Voris. Edited by Jerome Mushkat. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-87580-298-2. Maps. Notes and sources. Index. Pp. xi, 321. \$36.00.

Military historians will find much of interest in this collection of correspondence from an Ohio regimental commander to his wife. Alvin C. Voris had no previous military experience when the war started. Like many other young men with local stature, this thirty-four-year-old lawyer and state legislator from Akron, Ohio, organized a volunteer regiment during the first year of the war. In early 1862, he led his 67th Ohio infantry into the Virginia valley against Stonewall Jackson. The unit subsequently took part in the ill-fated assault at Fort Wagner on the South Carolina coast in July 1863. Commanding a brigade that included the 67th Ohio, Voris fought with the Army of the James on the southeastern flanks of Richmond from May 1864 through the end of the war. He and his men helped block Robert E. Lee's last line of escape at Appomattox on 9 April 1865.

Three years of hard experience transformed Voris from an eager greenhorn into a battle-hardened veteran. He adjusted to the rigors of camp life and learned his new trade as a warrior. A bullet that grazed his leg at Kernstown and a potentially fatal wound in the abdomen at Fort Wagner took the romance out of combat, as did the "heart sickening" sight of the wounded and maimed (p. 185). Voris learned too that "the hospital does vastly more execution than the battle field" (p. 29). Pawns on a gigantic and sprawling chessboard, he and his men marched hundreds of miles trying to bag the elusive Jackson. This experience left Voris "much worn out" but much more enlightened about warfare (p. 57). Privately contemptuous of the leadership exhibited by Nathaniel Banks, Voris recognized in retrospect that Jackson had managed to divert a significant fraction of the Union army. His own insights as a strategist grew out of the Valley campaign. Voris, who noted that Jackson had avoided "taking and holding any given locality," decided that Union commanders should likewise forget about control of territory or "distributing the army all over the country" (pp. 64, 76). Instead they should concentrate their forces and compel the rebel armies to fight. Only one thing mattered to Voris: the Union army had to "whip the rebels" and it had to have civilian and military leadership that understood what needed to be done (p. 182).

What emerges from these pages is the portrait of a literate western Yankee who tried to impose order, system, sobriety, and punctuality. One private thought Voris "stricter than hell," but he likely won their respect (p. 292 n. 10). He turned a blind eye when his hungry men plundered the food supplies of the rural South. Predisposed to believe the South was blighted by "barbarism" and "despotism" and out of step with the modern world, he wrestled with the apparent paradox: why did the Johnnies fight so tenaciously? He admired their "self-sacrificing" courage, and judged that "common danger cements them" (p. 91). Contemptuous of the slave system and

the master class, he celebrated sarcastically when “the ungrateful colored population” absconded “without as much as saying good bye” (p. 98). He initially found the former slaves at St. Helen’s Island, South Carolina, “dispirited, suspicious, timid, grossly ignorant and degraded,” but later in the war he temporarily commanded a brigade of black soldiers who showed their readiness “to fight & make men of themselves” (p. 232). In November 1864 Voris reported that “in the army the prejudice heretofore existing against the negro has almost entirely died out”; he predicted—alas, prematurely—that northerners would soon “wonder why they were ever so unwise and unjust as to curse the colored man and damn his friends” (p. 233). These letters do not suggest that religious belief played an important part in the life either of the letter writer or recipient. What emerges instead is an unsentimental and stoic readiness to accept the possibility that he might prove “unfortunate” and never return from the wartime South (p. 103).

Voris, who knew that an army of citizen soldiers was a new thing in world history, wanted his letters preserved. Now expertly edited and fully annotated by Jerome Mushkat, this volume should attract a wider audience than specialists. It belongs on the library shelves at all colleges and universities that offer courses on the Civil War.

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Ironclads and Big Guns of the Confederacy: The Journal and Letters of John M. Brooke. Edited by George M. Brooke, Jr. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002. ISBN 1-57003-418-4. Illustrations. Notes. Index. Pp. xv, 257. \$39.95.

This publication of portions of the privately held Brooke papers is a boon to students of Civil War naval history, providing scholarly access to much valuable material that has not been readily available. It mixes entries from John M. Brooke’s diary and letters that he sent or received with occasional illustrative excerpts from other sources such as the papers of Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory and Admiral Franklin Buchanan, and the collections of the National Archives.

The bulk of the work is from Brooke’s journal and papers, with an introduction that traces his pre-Civil War career and a brief summary of his life after the war. The material is rich in technical detail that gives a glimpse of the difficulties the Confederacy faced in simultaneously mobilizing its nascent industrial base, adopting new technology, and fighting a war. Besides providing details of the Confederate Navy’s ordnance program, Brooke’s papers illuminate the organization itself. The widespread frustration of Confederate junior officers with “old fogeyism” (p. 96), a Navy bureaucracy “about as poorly officered as possible” (p. 92), and a hopeless promotion system (pp. 98, 111, 113) is evident. Brooke’s continuing correspondence with