



PROJECT MUSE®

Virginians at War: The Civil War Experiences of Seven Young Confederates (review)

William Harris Bragg

The Journal of Military History, Volume 67, Number 1, January 2003,
pp. 247-248 (Review)

Published by Society for Military History
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2003.0009>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40435>

Virginians at War: The Civil War Experiences of Seven Young Confederates. By John G. Selby. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 2002. ISBN 0-8420-5054-X. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliographical essay. Index. Pp. xliv, 264. \$65.00.

Virginians at War marks the eighth publication in the excellent American Crisis Series edited by Steven E. Woodworth. As such, it exhibits the strengths of the preceding volumes: its commendably brief text gives an overview of a significant Civil War subject, based on printed sources (though locations for pertinent manuscript collections are supplied in a comprehensive bibliographical essay). Simultaneously published in library-quality hardcover and inexpensive, durable paperback (convenient for classroom use), *Virginians at War* and the other books in the series have to date presented engaging treatments of varied topics, carefully drawn from up-to-date surveys of the literature—a necessity, considering the continuing cascade of books relating to the Civil War.

John Selby's contribution to the series suggests, through its subtitle, a fairly modest agenda. But the book itself is quite rich, moving past the experiences of seven young Confederates to try to determine their reasons for fighting (or for supporting the war), their persistence in continuing the fight, and their postwar assessment of what the conflict had meant. Given the last of his criteria, the author necessarily chose survivors. Indeed, all lived at least a decade into the twentieth century, and the majority saw the start of worldwide war in 1914.

To previous generations, the title of Selby's book would probably have suggested soldiers alone. But, though four of these Virginians were fighting men, the remaining three subjects were women (though as much "Confederate nationalists" as their male counterparts). That the three lived in north-eastern Virginia (with one of them in the center of Mosby's Confederacy) assured them frequent encounters with soldiers from both sides.

At her family's home near Front Royal, the somewhat dour Lucy Buck plays hostess to General James Longstreet and his staff—and finds majors Moxley Sorrel and Thomas Walton her "ideal of the chivalrous knights of yore, so courteous and delicate in their manner" (p. 98). Amanda Virginia Edmunds, a vivacious belle, proves less impressed with a "Dutch" Union soldier, who visits her family's Fauquier County plantation. Having heard him sing "I wish I was in Dixie, away, away," she hopes that he "may find a resting place in Dixie—and soon" (p. 54). As the only wife and mother of the group, Susan Caldwell of Warrenton offers a different perspective on Union occupation, and her bureaucrat husband's presence in Richmond provides, through his letters, a wider focus for the narrative.

Of the four warriors (two officers and two enlisted men), the most well-known is John H. Worsham, author of *One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry*. Worsham's vivid descriptions of battlefield incidents are complemented by accounts from two artillerymen in the Army of Northern Virginia, Henry Robinson Berkeley and William T. Poague.

Berkeley's ultimate imprisonment at Fort Delaware also offers a prisoner-of-war's experiences. The last of the soldiers, Alexander F. Fleet, performed garrison duty for most of the war (though he finally took a wound at Petersburg). Fleet comments incisively on what Selby identifies as one of the greatest enemies of soldiers—boredom, and another major foe, disease, also receives its due share of attention.

Selby's solidly researched and lucidly written book will appeal to scholars and buffs alike. Satisfyingly illustrated with portraits of its seven subjects (as well as a generous number of maps), *Virginians at War* offers a thoughtful, objective look at "ordinary people [who rose] to the demands of extraordinary circumstances" (p. 236). Deftly and convincingly, the book also places these seven lives fully within the context of the Virginia theater, from secession to surrender.

William Harris Bragg

Georgia College & State University
Milledgeville, Georgia

Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments. Edited by Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller. Bronx, N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8232-2146-7. Tables. Notes. Index. Pp. xvi, 508. \$25.00.

This volume, unusually large for a book of essays by various authors, explores topics within the currently popular area of Civil War social history. Its purpose is to explore the relationship between the soldiers in the armies and the families and communities they left behind.

The book's fifteen chapters are divided into three parts. In the first section of the book, three chapters deal with problems of recruitment. Though relatively few men were drafted, conscription was an important tool in recruitment, serving as a threat to drive men to volunteer. Bounties offered another inducement, while commutation payments and the hiring of substitutes were means by which unwilling men could keep themselves out of the ranks. Not surprisingly, wealthy men were more successful in staying out of uniform than were their poorer contemporaries.

The second section, with six chapters, contains several outstanding pieces. To mention them all in a short review would amount to a recitation of the table of contents. Especially interesting are Earl J. Hess's discussion of northern civilians' desire to know what battle was like and David A. Raney's study of the United States Christian Commission. Other topics include the Veteran Reserve Corps and its work in rear areas, religion among Union sailors, and the Union soldiers' longing for female companionship. The last named essay, by Patricia L. Richard, is a fascinating study based largely on newspaper advertisements placed by soldiers and civilians, seeking pen pals of the opposite sex.

The third part of the book deals with postwar adjustments. Among sev-