

Book Reviews

same time, however, the book is aimed at the general reader rather than at the student of history."

Wheeler then continues, "Being unwilling to clutter the narrative with numbers I have not specified the sources of historical quotes." And then in an earlier passage he indicates that he is obviously attempting to provide a sop for women when he notes, "A feature I have found of particular satisfaction is that, as with my previous book, *Siege of Vicksburg*, I've been able to include numerous accounts by women."

This work, while interesting to read and filled with excellent illustrations, maps, and other important data, would be much more valuable had the author employed the traditional historical approach in compiling such a study. Most assuredly Sherman is deserving of better treatment than that afforded by Wheeler despite the fact the author is a hero-worshiper of the man who might be regarded as the one most responsible for the North winning the Civil War.

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Stop the Evil: A Civil War History of Desertion and Murder, by Robert I. Alotta. San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978. pp. xvi, 202. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95.

Desertion was a major problem facing the Union army during the Civil War. *Stop the Evil* is the story of William H. Howe, a Union deserter who was executed by the Federal government for his crime. Howe, of Pennsylvania German background, uneducated, and simple in lifestyle, enlisted in the 116th Regiment, Company A, of the Pennsylvania Volunteers in August 1862 to avoid the draft. The young Pennsylvania farmer adjusted to the rigid army life and even to the fact that he was one of the few German Protestants in an Irish brigade.

However, by the late fall of 1862, conditions had changed drastically for the Pennsylvanians. Most of the 116th Regiment was killed at the Battle of Fredricksburg, Virginia, and Howe was shocked by the massacre. In addition to the horrible loss of lives, the remaining members of the regiment, including Howe, were stricken with dysentery. The disease, caused by a lack of proper sanitation and food, killed twice as many Union soldiers as did Confederate bullets. By late December 1862, Howe and several other members of the regiment

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

were so weak from the illness that they decided to return to Pennsylvania to seek medical treatment which the army failed to provide.

Howe's crime was classified as desertion. The crime of desertion was quite common in the Union army. Had Howe been an officer, he probably would have been granted a sick leave. Howe resumed normal civilian life after he regained his health. The army however viewed Howe as a deserter. By June of 1863, army officials caught up with Howe in his hometown of Perkiomenville, Pennsylvania. On July 13, Howe was captured at Allentown, Pennsylvania. He was charged with desertion and the murder of Abraham Bertolet. Bertolet was one of the officials tracking Howe.

Howe was tried by an army court-martial, convicted, and sentenced to death on November 28, 1863. The verdict was overturned by a review board and a new trial was ordered. On March 7, 1864, Howe was convicted a second time and again sentenced to hang. Howe's case was ultimately reviewed by President Abraham Lincoln who concurred with the decision. Howe was executed on August 26, 1864.

In this thoroughly researched, well written study, Robert I. Alotta examined the unusual circumstances surrounding the trial and execution of William H. Howe. The author discovered that some of the evidence presented against Howe was forged or fabricated, namely the muster rolls. At least one army officer who testified against Howe knew of the inaccuracy but was apparently more interested in his own career than in the life of William Howe. The even larger issue surrounding the case was the fact that the government decided to make an example of Howe because of the deserter problem and because he was from Pennsylvania, the center of deserter-draft resistance. The Federal government insisted upon the swift execution of Howe to set an example for future deserters. Howe also served as an example of the power of the government over the people in wartime. Howe was executed for a crime that he did not fully understand.

Alotta used newspapers, books, manuscripts, official documents, and letters in researching the book. The bibliography is complete and provides suggestions for further reading or research in Civil War desertion. The photographs contribute to the lively style of the work. The only weakness detected is the failure of the author to explore the role of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton in the case. *Stop the Evil* makes an important contribution to the historical literature of the Civil War and should be read by Civil War and non-Civil War specialists alike.

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