

The Charger



The Cleveland Civil War Roundtable

Sept. 2021

vol. #45 # 1

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President's Message

Fellow Roundtable Members:

I hope you are as excited about the 2021-2022 year as am I! The theme for this year is: **Rivers of Blood, Death and Victory**, as most of our presentations will involve Civil War actions and battles where rivers, as well as other bodies of water, played critical roles.

Our inaugural meeting, on September 8, is just around the corner. Dan Welch, an Emerging Civil War speaker, will address the Roundtable on the topic of Ohio units at Antietam. It will be both in-person and streamed live so that as many Civil War enthusiasts can enjoy Dan's presentation. If you haven't made your reservation for the meeting, please remember to do so as soon as possible by sending an email to ccwrtreserve@gmail.com. Cost of in-person attendance is \$35 per person.

Speaking of reservations, the field trip to Chickamauga September 24-25 is fast approaching as well. We have 15 confirmed attendees, and I hope more will sign up. To do so, please send an email to ccwrtreserve@gmail.com (same as for the dinner reservations), and send \$200 to our treasurer, Bob Pence, at the address on the website.

I am looking forward to a great year for the Roundtable, and hope to see all of you on September 8.

All the best, Mark Porter, President, 2021-2022

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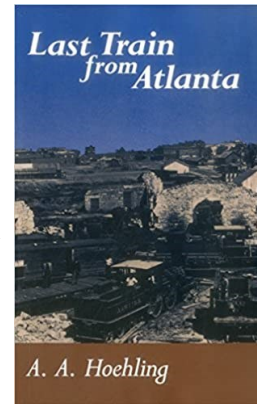
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“Last Train from Atlanta” Book Review by Paul Siedel

Perhaps one of the best non fiction Civil War narratives I’ve ever read is A.A. Hoehling’s “Last Train from Atlanta”. Very well researched and written in a format that is not found very often. Hoehling sets out to do a basic narrative but soon goes into excerpts from newspapers of the day both north and south and what they had to say about Sherman’s progress down through Georgia, and finally the siege of Atlanta itself. It is interesting to see the difference in reporting contrasted in the northern and southern papers. He also chooses several individuals from Atlanta who experienced the siege and takes excerpts from their diaries and narratives. The author also takes excerpts from the diaries of several volunteer nurses who administered to the wounded in villages around Atlanta. They convey the hellish conditions in hospitals in Newnan, Covington, Social Circle, and Madison, Georgia. A very touching incident that is mentioned is the death of a man and his little girl killed as one of Sherman’s artillery shells exploded near them as they walked near the intersection of Ivy and Ellis Streets. Several U.S. soldiers are quoted as their diaries have been preserved in various institutions and it’s interesting to observe the differences between the way U.S. and Confederate soldiers see the bombardment of the city. The book is a 550 page volume set up in a day by day format, it is divided into several main sections, June 1864 when Sherman’s army arrived on the outskirts of the city, July, August, September and finally Autumn. There is an interesting epilogue which goes into the lives of several characters after the War was over. It ends with Sherman’s army pulling up stakes and heading for the Atlantic coast after destroying about thirty-five percent of the city. The book reads well and I never got bored. Many pages of maps are included, but one would do well to have maps of metro Atlanta nearby as they read. Many photos portray the destruction of the City during the siege and as Sherman prepared to leave for his March to the Sea. The book is well researched and the bibliography looks like a library itself. Diaries, letters, newspaper articles, and government documents are all listed and were consulted. The book was published in 1958 and interestingly enough contains quotes from several at that time elderly folks who actually knew the people mentioned in the book. One old man the author interviewed recalled Miss Mary Gay who confronted U.S. troops in Decatur, Georgia and hid Confederate General Granbury’s uniform in her house. When the book was published her home was actually still standing in Decatur, Georgia but according to Google Maps has been replaced by a parking garage. Since the book was published in 1958 there is little chance a book store would have it, however The American Book Exchange or Amazon would probably have it in stock as used books.

All in all the book is a valuable source when studying the psychology behind what people went through during the Civil War and how they reacted to various situations, specifically the siege of Atlanta. Many people had been fed a diet of lies which included rape, plunder, children being torn from the arms of their mothers and sent north to work in coal mines. As the bombardment



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increased and the fighting around Jonesboro gave way to Hood's retreat panic set in and it is amazing to see what people would do to secure a spot on the last train from Atlanta.

Excerpts from "Last Train from Atlanta:"

Columbus, Georgia Times (for August 25, 1864)

"On Wednesday night a large 42 pound shell entered the Presbyterian Church on Marietta street and after passing through the pulpit exploded in the basement of the Sunday School"

New York Times (for August 25, 1864)

"Life in the trenches is growing monotonous. The men are getting rest from the fatigue of the active three months campaign, and yet it is not rest that they need, for there is a constant state of expectancy, which is tiresome to the mind and, through sympathy, prevents the thorough recuperation of the physical energies so much needed. "

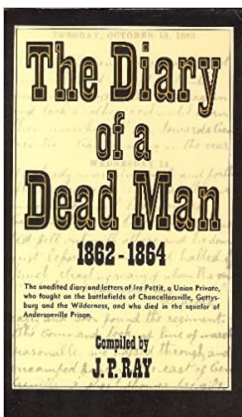
Autumn 1864

After Sherman's order to evacuate the civilian population everyone had to go. A family called the Braumullers proceeded to New York via Pittsburgh. " We were considered curiosities all along the line, for we wore clothes that had been made before the war, and they were now four years out of style. New styles hadn't penetrated into the Confederacy"

Dwellings , such as those vacated by the Braumullers, were now "home" to Federal officers, settled in as though they had always lived in them.

Diary of A Dead Man

Book Review by Paul Siedel



Probably one of the most poignant books I've ever read is "Diary of a Dead Man " compiled by J. P. Ray. It was discovered in the Petitt family archives in Wilson, New York back in the 1970s. Much of the diary had been torn out and which is part of the mystery that goes with the person who wrote the diary, one Ira Petitt of Wilson, New York, and his enlistment in the Army, his training at Ft. Independence near Boston, his campaign experience, capture and finally his death at Andersonville prison. The book starts out slow with Ira's entries and the day to day workings on the family farm in upstate New York. His birthday is May 12, and he shortly afterwards signs up for the U.S. Army, in May of 1862. He is at this point twenty one years of age. He is taken to Fort Independence and there is drilled and becomes familiar with military practices. It is during this time that he sends several letters to his sister and friends. The author of the book does a tremendous job of researching these people and one finds out much about the lives of Ira's associates

before, during and after the War. He ships out via New York City and Washington D.C. and is soon at Gettysburg and then on to New York City again to help quell the draft riots in

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July of 1863. He does duty during the Mine Run Campaign and then is detailed to ride the Orange and Alexandria Railroad between Culpepper and Alexandria, Virginia. It is while he is on duty near Mechanicsville, Virginia that his unit is surrounded and he is captured by the rebels. After a short stay in Castle Thunder prison he is put aboard a train for Andersonville. He arrives shortly after the execution of the Raiders and writes home saying that he is in good health. However by September he is suffering from Scurvy and diarrhea. By October he supposedly unable to walk and could not join the rest of his unit when it made it's exit to Millen, Georgia in September of 1864. He is left behind and dies in the hospital there at Andersonville. His family is contacted in 1865 by several of his old cohorts and his father begins writing to the Gregory family and is eventually sent Ira's diary after being informed that his mess mate had gone the California. None of his personal effects was ever recovered and to this day no one knows what happened to them. There is some question as to why his diary was so mutilated when his family recovered it in 1865. Did the Confederates at the prison tear out the missing pages or did one of his cohorts tear them out for devious reasons. Several of the men he was captured with were less than admirable and it is speculated that one of them took Ira's personal effects. This individual spent the remainder of his life in California and finally died in a veterans home in Compton, California in the 1930s.

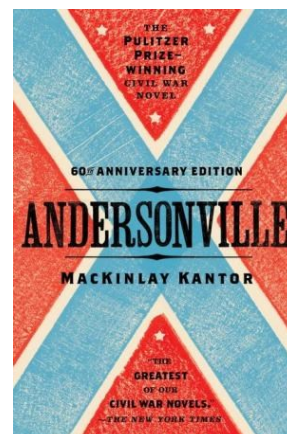
All in all "Diary of A Dead Man" is a great read. Slow at first when Ira is discussing his life on the farm but it is nevertheless a great picture of how life was in nineteenth century New York State. His descriptions of army life presents a great picture of the give and take of life in an army unit during duty hours and then during combat. At the end of the book one has to ask themselves "did Ira die in the prison hospital, did he die in the camp itself, or was he murdered by one of his supposed caretakers when they found out he was going to die anyway and just put an end to him and took his personal effects? We will probably never know

"Andersonville"

By MacKinlay Kantor

A book review by Paul Siedel "Andersonville"

Someone once said that beginning a major novel is kind of like getting married; one has to be ready to make a commitment. So it was with some trepidation that I picked up and decided to re-read MacKinlay Kantor's Pulitzer Prize-Winning blockbuster novel "Andersonville" and I'm glad I did.



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Kantor's seven hundred and sixty page novel is well deserving of the Pulitzer Prize. Although the book is a work of historical fiction it is well researched and follows the history of the prison from its first inception with the arrival of the surveyors in 1863 until its demise and final closing in May of 1865. Most of the foremost characters are fictitious such as Ira Claffey, his daughter and family on whose plantation the prison was supposedly built, but many of the characters he associates with the prison itself are not. He goes into the choosing of Henry Wirz, General Winder, Dr. Joseph Jones as prison officials and it is dedicated to one Randolph Stevenson formerly a surgeon in the Army of the Confederate States of America. Kantor goes on for hundreds of pages about several fictitious characters their family lives, their decision to enlist, their experiences in the army and their thoughts. The reader can't help but wonder what does this have to do with the Andersonville Prison. Then he goes into their final capture their life in prison and their lingering death. One almost feels as though they knew these characters and when they suddenly die or are shot for going over the "dead line" it as though one loses someone they know. This is what makes the novel so memorable, and it is a technique the author uses often. Kantor covers the situation concerning the raiders their habit of preying upon their fellow prisoners and the final effort which overcame them and their trial and execution. All described in dramatic detail and although some of the incident as he portrays it is fictitious much is not. The names of the Raiders and their final execution are true to history. The arrival of the Plymouth Pilgrims captured at Plymouth, North Carolina in 1864, the theft, beating and final death of many of them by the Raiders is well documented. The condition of Sweetwater Branch or Stockade Creek as it came to be known was filthy beyond description as the men used it for a latrine and tried to get water from it near the western edge of the stockade before it became so foul. It was purely by chance that after a torrential downpour a spring broke through in the hillside near the South Gate and gave some relief to the hundreds of men dying of thirst. The spring today is known as Providence Spring.

In September 1864 the Confederate Government became concerned that the prison would be liberated by a contingent of General Sherman's army. They began to scale down the 32,000 prisoners by sending them off to such places such as Millen, Georgia, and Florence, South Carolina. By November only the ones that couldn't walk anymore were left. Among them was a young boy named Ira Petit of the Fifth U.S. Army Corps. Captured at Mechanicsville, Virginia, he enlisted on his birthday May 12, 1862 full of enthusiasm for army life and the winning of the War. He died at Andersonville in October of 1864 suffering from scurvy and with his legs so drawn up he couldn't walk to the gate. This story was not fiction and his headstone may be seen at the Andersonville National Cemetery today. One can read just so much of this before they begin to sympathize with the men and their position when many of them knew they would never pass through the gates again while they were alive.

Although the copyright is from 1955 one may still purchase the book at various national park bookstores and of course on Amazon Books and The American Book Exchange.

Several years ago I visited Andersonville National Historic Site (which is just off I 75) on my way to Florida and I must say that it is the only historic site (other than Auschwitz and the Anne Frank House) where people were actually walking around with tears.

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The Civil War Experiences of William A. Fletcher, the Sam Watkins of the Army of Northern Virginia

by David A. Carrino



Anyone who watched the Ken Burns PBS series about the Civil War became familiar with Sam Watkins. Watkins was a Confederate soldier in the 1st Tennessee Infantry Regiment, which was part of the Army of Tennessee. After the Civil War Watkins wrote about his wartime experiences in the book *Company Aytch*, and some of Watkins' quotes from his book were used in the Ken Burns series. Another and much less known memoir describing the Civil War experiences of a soldier was written by a Confederate named William A. (Bill) Fletcher, who served for more than two years in the infantry in John Bell Hood's Texas Brigade and then finished the war in Terry's Texas Rangers (the 8th Texas Cavalry Regiment). Fletcher wrote about his Civil War experiences in his book *Rebel Private: Front and Rear*. Fletcher was born in Louisiana in 1839, and his family moved to Texas in 1856, eventually settling in Beaumont. As a member of the Texas Brigade, Fletcher fought in the Seven Days Battles and the Battles of Second Manassas, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and Chickamauga. He was wounded in the abdomen at Second Manassas, rejoined his unit after recuperating, and was wounded again at Chickamauga. His second wound, which was to his foot, led him to transfer to the cavalry. While serving in the cavalry, he was captured, but later escaped, rejoined his unit, and saw his last combat at Bentonville, after which he returned to Beaumont.

Fletcher wrote his book from memory many years after the war, and it was first published in 1908, 26 years after the publication of Watkins' book. Not only is the content of Fletcher's book of historical interest, but the book, itself, has an interesting history. After its publication, almost all of the copies of the book were lost in a fire at the house where those copies were stored. The few copies that could be saved were damaged by smoke or water. The Library of Congress, by some unknown means, obtained a copy of the book, and historians became aware of it. One person who read the book was Margaret Mitchell, who wrote to Fletcher's daughter that the book was Mitchell's most valuable research source for *Gone with the Wind*.

Fletcher's book is well worth reading for his vivid descriptions of Civil War combat. For example, he wrote about two of his comrades in the Texas Brigade who were directly in front of him during a charge at Gaines' Mill. Because these men were moving slowly, Fletcher urged them forward with harsh words, but "the words had not been uttered many seconds when a cannon ball had struck each near the shoulder and tore the bodies badly." He described a gory incident that he witnessed at Second Manassas when a courier and his horse were struck by artillery. Fletcher wrote in words that sound both grim and glib that "a shell struck them and exploded, and there was a scattering of parts of both man and horse." He also related his honest thoughts at Gettysburg when his brigade received an order to charge the Union position. Because he recognized the futility of the charge, he vacillated between duty and survival by thinking, "I could see no object in the move...and I was considering which was preferable—disgrace or death." Equally gripping are Fletcher's descriptions of the grim consequences of combat and his commentary about this

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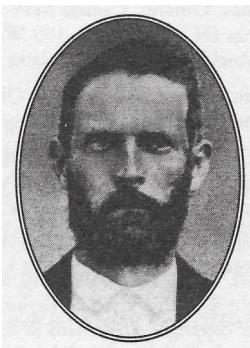


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After observing the aftermath of a battle, he noted bitterly that it was possible to "feel the seriousness of the surroundings with all its horrors and to see the little regard for human life and property so victory and the lauding of a few can be attained." He recalled "the awful stench that at times would greet one's nostrils, and in this instance myriads of flies." There are gruesome descriptions of the Union dead at Fredericksburg. Fletcher saw on the morning after the battle that "nearly all the dead Yankees who were in sight were naked." He also wrote, "I saw more dead bodies of the right kind, covering broad acres, than it was ever my pleasure to see before or since." In response to any reader who thinks that "such expressions as this are brutal," Fletcher wrote, in words William T. Sherman would probably agree with, that "all courageous soldiers are brutes," for "if one shudders at a dead enemy, he has but little place in the ranks." This comment encapsulates the mental and emotional state that takes hold of a soldier in the kill-or-be-killed realities of combat.



Fletcher's scorn toward Union soldiers came partly from what he perceived as hypocrisy among them relative to Fletcher's view of the war's major cause. In Fletcher's opinion, the war, from the Union perspective, "was all done to free the negro," but "three out of four of the liberators cared not a copper for the freedom of the negro." The clearest indication that Fletcher felt no remorse about the Union dead is in an anecdote that he related about the time that he took a knapsack from a Union corpse and later that day went through the knapsack's contents. "At an opportune time I examined my knapsack, found several well written letters and from the wording, that fellow sure had some sweet girl stuck on him for she was anticipating a happy meeting and fulfillment of vows, when the 'Rebs' were whipped and the cruel war was over. Letters did not arouse any sympathy in me, nor have I felt one pang of regret for being a party to breaking up that match." It is distressing to think of the young woman who wrote those letters losing the man with whom she was planning to spend her life, and Fletcher's coldhearted words show just how strong was his animosity toward all those, military or civilian, whom he numbered among the enemy. Fletcher provided his justification for his callous view on the deaths of Union soldiers when he wrote that "self-preservation born in man is one of his strongest traits, and if killing an invader in one's country is not self-preservation, please define."

Perhaps paradoxically, Fletcher felt compassion toward wounded Union soldiers. Fletcher wrote that "one's thought when seeing the enemy's helpless wounded are far different than when seeing the dead. My thoughts on seeing the dead were without one pang of regret or sorrow; but it was the reverse to see the living suffering." Fletcher took this compassion to a level that is controversial even today when he was in a field hospital after he received his wound at Chickamauga. While Fletcher lay in the hospital, he saw a severely wounded Confederate soldier, who "was shot through the head" and "from the sides the brain could be seen oozing out." The sight of this wounded soldier caused Fletcher to think that mercy killing should be an option for this man. As Fletcher wrote, "I thought how brutal human custom was in this particular, and wondered if it was handed down from barbarism and why it was that doctor or friend could not end one's misery."

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Eventually it came time for Fletcher's turn with the surgeon, and the doctor decided on amputation. Fletcher refused to allow this, and the surgeon abided by the patient's wishes and sent him to a hospital in Augusta to recuperate. The makeshift hospital where Fletcher recovered was a church which was staffed by the Sisters of Charity, a Catholic order of nuns. These nuns ministered to Fletcher and helped him to recover from his wound. Fletcher, who was not Catholic, had been taught prior to the war that "there was no place in heaven for a catholic." But he left the hospital with a very high regard for the Sisters of Charity after his foot was saved in spite of a bout of gangrene. The book's Afterword relates that following the war Fletcher became financially successful and highly respected in the lumber business, and as a gesture of gratitude to the Sisters of Charity, he donated funds to assist in construction of their hospital in his hometown of Beaumont.

Fletcher's book also discusses some of the deprivations and hygienic insufficiencies that he and other Confederate soldiers had to endure. Fletcher described how he became infested with lice shortly after enlisting. In his words, "I was well supplied with them of all sizes." He wrote about beef that "when cooked, would turn to jelly." He also wrote about an incident when a peddler came into camp and sold the soldiers sausage, which he noted was "one of our favorite dishes." But when Fletcher was eating the sausage, he made an unsavory discovery. Fletcher recalled, "I found what I supposed was a cat's claw." After this discovery, others who were eating the sausage inspected it closely, and "there were other finds of a similar character." Fletcher further related that this experience for him and his comrades "caused a slump in the sausage market." Regarding another of life's essentials, he wrote that on the march from Gettysburg back to Virginia, "My shoes were old and so were my clothes. My pants were frazzled and split up to the knees."

Fletcher indicated that on the earlier march in the other direction, there had been considerable foraging from northern civilians in defiance of Robert E. Lee's order not to do so. This included a detailed description of a nighttime raid on a chicken coop that Fletcher was part of. Foraging played a large role in the time that Fletcher served in the cavalry. He wrote about the barren territory in which his unit operated during the latter part of the war and how this caused much suffering among civilians. Foraging was also important to Fletcher after his escape from Union captivity, which he accomplished by jumping from a moving train while he was being transported to his intended incarceration in the North. His guile and resourcefulness after his escape allowed him to sustain himself, and his main source of food was people sympathetic to the Confederate cause who lived in the thinly settled areas through which Fletcher journeyed to rejoin his unit.

Interspersed throughout the narrative parts of the text are Fletcher's short commentaries on various topics. These commentaries are one of the truly engaging aspects of his book. For example, Fletcher was of the opinion that prior to the war, "The hotheaded politician and preacher seemed to be molding public opinion without any regard for the country as a whole," which is a state of affairs that is certainly applicable to the present. The time he spent as a Union prisoner after his capture in Georgia and prior to his escape included daily rations of one thin slice of beef and two crackers as well as living in "filth...without fuel or heat." This led him to write, "I had heard the abuses the enemy were heaping on the South about the treatment of prisoners, and as I was an inmate of one of their prisons, I thought I could fairly reason on prison life...and I concluded that neither side had anything to boast of...I do not pretend to say that the Southern prisons were any better...but I concluded they could be no worse." Fletcher, who lived through the post-war period in which the myth of the tried men being shot down like dogs." Fletcher continued, "Where is our boasted Lee? Why is this ignorance?" And he wrote further, "As for Longstreet, he was excusable, as far as I was concerned."

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Fletcher's comments on the end of the war are also interesting. He wrote that when his army surrendered, "I passed a few days of the blankest part of my existence." He also insisted, "I have ever been thankful that during the war and since, I carried no hatred against the victorious foe," which is a difficult statement to accept in light of his repeated mention of a lack of remorse about seeing dead enemy soldiers. To his credit, Fletcher was friendly with Northerners who came to Beaumont after the war, which led to him being "spoken to, upon several occasions, about...my friendship for the Yanks." A humorous incident that Fletcher experienced on his journey home led him to accept his forced return into the Union. Fletcher recalled that during his cavalry unit's return to Texas, the mounted troopers were passing by a North Carolina infantry unit when one of the North Carolinians shouted to the Texans, "Boys, have you got any bacon?" After the cavalrymen replied that they did, the North Carolinian retorted, "Grease and slide back into the Union." Fletcher wrote in his book, "The remark and the novel way of the use of bacon, forced a laugh from several...I laughed and thought, and had not ridden far before I made up my mind to follow the lesson taught by the crude advice; so from that I commenced to think of the coming civil life."

As someone who suffered through four years of bloody war, Fletcher directed his most scathing words at those whom he saw as responsible for inciting the carnage. For example, he wrote, "I have learned that those who agitate war are mere trumpets and not fighters." He was also critical of those who "assume the role of God and bring down punishment upon the helpless innocent to correct the errors of others." Fletcher's thoughts on the need to fight a war in order to end slavery and of the war's lessons about humanity were summarized in the comment, "I often think of how fortunate the generation before and after were, for it was a question that had to be settled at some time and it was simply a repetition of history that boasted educated christianized man still retains his savage ancestor's law that 'might is right.'" Whether the reader agrees or disagrees with Fletcher's opinions and assertions, his commentaries are interesting because they are the opinions of someone who seemed to be not so much pro-slavery or pro-secession, but pro-South.

The writing in the book is conversational, as if Fletcher is sitting with the reader and casually discussing his recollections of the war. When reading the book, it is difficult not to mentally hear the words without a Southern accent, which lends a folksy charm to the text. Some of the phrasing has an amusing twist, such as "I was a moderately fast runner, especially when scared," "the always dreaded confinement of a prisoner," and Fletcher's lauding a minister who "preached for the good and not for the gold." Similarly, throughout the book when Fletcher relates events in which he was accompanied by someone, he refers to his companion as "Pard," which is short for partner. These and other humorous phrasings and wordings give levity to the book and balance the grim discussions of combat and death.

As with all memoirs, there are the unavoidable shortcomings of potential faulty memory and possible embellishment or even outright fabrication. Quotations in the book are presented in quotation marks as if the statements were definitively recorded. Most likely these quotes contain at most the substance of what was said, but Fletcher can probably be excused for this format. Some of the events described in the book seem far-fetched, particularly the events after Fletcher's escape from a Union prison. Nevertheless, even if Fletcher embellished the seemingly fanciful

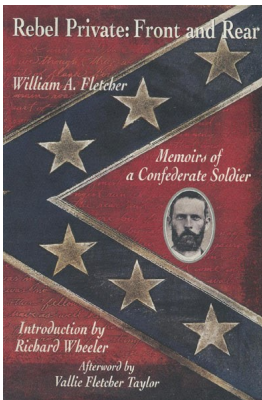
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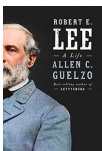
recollections that he described during his largely solitary journey after his escape, his survival from this ordeal was a product of fierce perseverance and keen ingenuity as well as the good fortune to find people from whom he could successfully beg. That he was industrious and tenacious is evident from the book's Afterword, which was written by Fletcher's great-granddaughter and describes his post-war life.

Bill Fletcher had an acute capacity for observation, and his wartime experiences engendered in him strong and sometimes seemingly contradictory opinions. His memoir is worth a read because it provides a perspective that differs from the majority of Civil War books. Rather than a focus on officers or statesmen, *Rebel Private: Front and Rear* gives the first-person experiences, mindset, and viewpoints of a soldier in the ranks, and for this reason it provides a rare perspective into the war.

As of the date of writing this article (August 22, 2021), Fletcher's book is available online as a scanned PDF (<https://archive.org/details/rebelprivatefron00flet/page/n5/mode/2up>). Unfortunately, this online version does not include the Afterword, which in my copy of the book is dated October 1994.

From Dennis Keating:

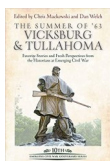
Interested in writing reviewing a book? Here are a few new Civil War books (among many) that could be reviewed by some of our members:



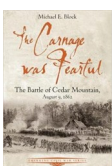
Allen Guelzo. Robert E. Lee: A Life.



Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburg: General Joshua Chamberlain



Chris Mackowski. The Summer of '63: Vicksburg and Tullahoma



Michael Block. The Carnage was Fearful: The Battle of Cedar Mountain.

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Meeting Sept. 8th, 2021

Program: Ohio Units at the Battle of Antietam

Speaker: Dan Welch, Seasonal Park Ranger. Gettysburg National Military Park

Location: Holiday Inn, 6001 Rockside Rd., Independence

Time: 6pm

The talk will be both in-person and streamed live so that as many Civil War enthusiasts can enjoy Dan's presentation.

For reservations go to: ccwrtreserve@gmail.com or call, 440-449-9311

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