

Friendly Enemies: Soldier Fraternization Throughout the American Civil War. By Lauren Thompson. (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2020) Pp. 240. Hardcover, \$55.

Lauren Thompson's book *Friendly Enemies* examines fraternization between Union and Confederate soldiers over the course of the American Civil War. Civil War historians have known about instances of fraternization, and cited evidence of it anecdotally from soldiers' letters, diaries and memoirs. Thompson's *Friendly Enemies* is the first large-scale systematic analysis of this wartime social phenomenon. Fraternization likely occurred in many places over the entire span of the war, but was documented in an unsystematic manner. It most commonly occurred when the contending armies camped in close proximity for prolonged periods of time, such as during winter camps and sieges. For example, there were numerous documented instances of fraternization over the winter of 1862-1863 when both armies camped across from each other along the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Other incidents of fraternization occurred during the ceasefires called to collect the dead and injured at the siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi in mid-1863.

Thompson provides evidence from soldiers' letters and diaries of the numerous instances when soldiers from opposing armies crossed the picket lines and shared coffee, meals and other comfort items like tobacco, alcohol and newspapers. Soldiers did so knowingly risking arrest. They did it because, Thompson argues, it was beneficial and enjoyable. It brought them moments of escape and peace as well as the ability to assert their individual will and freedom in the otherwise controlled subordination of the military regime. Thompson argues that it was a means of providing mental escape from the hardships of war by providing common soldiers an opportunity to commiserate about their hardships.

Thompson examines fraternization widely, from soldiers' accounts on both sides and across the time span of the war. She focuses on the occasions when the competing armies were camped in close proximity to each other for extended periods of time. Thompson specifically does not examine fraternization between guards and prisoners, nor between soldiers and civilians. She documents over three hundred instances of fraternization: 70 percent from participants and 30 percent from witnesses. This represents a small sample of the approximately 2.75 million soldiers who served during the war. Thompson finds that the majority of fraternizers were ideologically committed to the war's conclusion, rather than noncommittal resisters. Thompson also observes that fraternization exclusively took place between white soldiers. Confederate soldiers with beliefs in white supremacy did not fraternize with Black Union soldiers. Historians such as Kenneth Noe and Jason Phillips have argued that fraternization did not fundamentally change the perceptions each side previously held about the enemy.¹ Thompson supports these assessments, but also argues that the interactions generated empathy and eroded stereotypes for the individual soldiers who engaged in them. Fraternizations, she argues, were exceptional occurrences within an otherwise brutal and violent war.

Friendly Enemies is organized thematically by chapter. Events and evidence for fraternization within each chapter are presented chronologically. Chapter One examines how picket duty provided the space for common soldiers to avoid and resist the scrutiny of their

¹ Kenneth Noe, *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army After 1861* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 100-101; Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 69-70.

superiors. Regular soldiers blamed politicians, elites, Copperheads and others who stayed home for starting a war and then leaving the fighting to common soldiers. Chapter Two examines incidences of fraternization from Fredericksburg, Vicksburg and Chickamauga/Chattanooga in 1862-63 through Atlanta and Petersburg in 1864. These were places where major campaigns and sieges occurred, and the competing armies were camped in close proximity for prolonged periods of time (interspersed with short periods of intense battles). Soldiers learned that opposing soldiers suffered the same hardships of homesickness, boredom, manual labor, extreme weather, disease, combat anxiety, and other privations. They learned to commiserate with material goods, jokes, singing and discussion. In Chapter Three, Thompson examines the informal trade networks that developed between the combatants and which remained over the course of the war. Southern tobacco was traded for Northern coffee, among numerous other items. Soldiers' exchange of goods allowed the exchange of ideas by temporarily setting aside political differences and fostering white male camaraderie.

Chapter Four examines how information about politics, the progress of the war and news about their own and the enemy's home fronts was disseminated across enemy lines through the exchange of newspapers. Receiving enemy newspapers was the most frequently punished form of fraternization because it presented the greatest risk of jeopardizing military planning. Yet it also allowed soldiers to evaluate if their war sacrifices were making an impact. More often than not, fraternizers got away with it as officers usually looked the other way. There were only about thirty Union court martial cases for fraternization, over half of which were for exchanging newspapers. Men were often acquitted due to a lack of evidence or because they intended to trade non-newspaper goods. Punishments were arbitrarily determined. They included public reprimands, having all or some pay withheld for a number of months, and/or months of hard labor assignments. One sergeant was demoted in rank, and a lieutenant was discharged from the army without pay. Thompson does not cover the extent to which fraternization was punished in the Confederacy due to a lack of archival evidence.

Chapter Five explains how prolonged sieges and entrenchments led to the creation of soldier-organized short-term ceasefires to alleviate the fruitlessness of constant picket firing. Fraternization thus improved morale and improved the chances of survival during prolonged sieges. Instances of fraternization at Petersburg emphasize the fact that it was exclusively undertaken by white soldiers. White soldiers intentionally excluded Black soldiers from engaging in ceasefire interactions. In Chapter Six, Thompson examines the post-war memories that soldiers held about their fraternization experiences. She argues that these reminiscences contributed to the solidification of reconciliation and the continued racism that suppressed the original causation of the Civil War. Fraternization, according to Thompson, promoted sectional reconciliation and white supremacy. This is evident when comparing and contrasting fraternization accounts written during and after the war.

Thompson clearly and concisely expands our knowledge about the widespread occurrence of combatant fraternization. This phenomenon has been under-researched and Thompson capably places it into focus and context. This is an important aspect of Civil War life that should be integrated into our overall understanding of soldiers' experiences. Thompson demonstrates that fraternization should be interpreted as more than just a side activity induced by the trauma of warfare. The interactions sought by the contending soldiers were a means of satisfying physical and psychological needs. Fraternization provided rare and invaluable opportunities to obtain physically comforting materials, for mental stimulation through discussion and access to foreign newspapers, to allow for the subversion of unrelenting military

authority, and to provide soldiers a chance to commiserate and attain some small degree of comfort in mentally resolving their wartime experiences.

A comprehensive perspective, however, should also factor in the numerous instances of animosity between opposing sides. Historians such as Ovid Futch, William Hesselstine, Michael Horrigan and William Marvel, for example, have documented hundreds of instances of animosity and mistreatment between imprisoned white soldiers and prison guards.² Serious white-on-white soldier neglect and mistreatment occurred at Civil War prisons. Additionally, historians have also identified looting and destruction by soldiers upon civilians, such as Joseph Glatthaar has done for the Union campaign through Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. Confederates also enacted depredations on civilians in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania in the days before the Battle of Gettysburg.³ Severe and violent animosities between former Union and Confederate soldiers continued through Reconstruction and beyond. Indeed, prominent modern divides between conservatives and liberals can be traced to Civil War sectional tensions. The shared affirmation of white supremacy expressed as fraternization during the Civil War must be weighed against white animosities that persisted long after the war's conclusion. Thompson's study is of great interest to any Civil War historian, War and Society historian and others interested in communication between wartime enemy lines.

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² Ovid Futch, *History of Andersonville Prison*, rev. ed. (Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1999); William Hesselstine, ed., *Civil War Prisons* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1972); Michael Horrigan, *Elmira: Death Camp of the North* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002); William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

³ Edwin Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (1978; repr., New York: Touchstone Books, 1997); Joseph Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns* (1985; repr., Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Stephen Sears, *Gettysburg* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004).