*The Howling Storm.* By Kenneth Noe. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2020) Pp. 670. Hardcover, $55.

In *The Howling Storm*, Kenneth Noe asserts the important role that climate and weather played as a variable in the outcomes of American Civil War campaigns. Noe's focus on weather and climate may lead the reader to assume that this book is an environmental history examining the environmental impacts of the Civil War. Rather, *The Howling Storm* elucidates environmental conditions as a critically important variable in how the various military encounters unfolded, climaxed, terminated and their aftermath. Noe's approach accepts and incorporates the interpretations of other Civil War historians. Noe does not seek to proffer revelatory explanations about the performances of particular military units or commanders. Instead, he emphasizes and illuminates how climate and weather prove to be as important a variable in military outcomes as political pressure, strategy and tactics, command decisions, and situational circumstances.

The book is organized chronologically, covering major campaigns and an array of minor engagements from 1861 to 1865. Noe integrates weather observations recorded by both civilians and military surgeons from different places throughout the war. He also integrates information about the weather gathered from newspapers along with civilian and military letters, diaries, memoirs and histories. He utilizes government reports, ships' logs, and the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion. Additionally, he brings in modern scientific information about climate zones and soil types to further enhance the historical weather descriptions. Noe recognizes that El Niño and La Niña events during the Civil War years created unusual and sometimes extreme weather conditions. Global climate fluctuations caused heat and cold spells as well as increased rain and snowfalls at unanticipated times. Additionally, a negative North Atlantic Oscillation caused colder winters along the Atlantic coast during most of the war. An historical drought occurred in the American west between 1856 and 1865. The Confederacy experienced acute droughts during all summers of the Civil War. Excessively wet springs and prolonged summer droughts caused severe food shortages.

Many historians levy harsh criticisms of Civil War commanders who failed to effect victories or follow up initial battlefield successes with continued campaigns.[1] Noe demonstrates that on many occasions environmental conditions placed soldiers into combat when they were exhausted, cold, overheated and starving because heavy rain, snow, and muddy or dusty roads had worn them out after long marches. These conditions also prevented the receipt of badly needed supplies. On numerous occasions, badly flooded streams altered the course of campaigns, changing armies' ability to advance or retreat. Noe provides clear evidence of how unpredictable weather conditions stymied the strategies of the contending forces. For example, during the Mine Run Campaign one month before the end of 1863, General George Meade attempted to surprise General Robert E. Lee's army with a fast crossing of the Rapidan River. Noe explains how for several days, heavy rain and mud delayed the crossing and attack. Temperatures dropped below freezing the nights before the attack. For two nights before the

[1] For example, see: criticism of General George Meade (among others) in Edwin Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (New York: Touchstone, 1967); criticism of General Joseph Hooker (among others) in Steven Sears, *Chancellorsville* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); criticisms of Generals Thomas J. Jackson and Joseph E. Johnston (among others) in Douglass S. Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command,* 3 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

Battle of Mine Run, Meade's army slept on the ground with no fires allowed. Daytime temperatures were in the thirties and forties. Some of the men on picket duty suffering from the cold had to be carried back to camp on stretchers (364).

Many interpretations that explain Civil War military wins and losses tend to overlook the importance of environmental factors and focus instead on the willingness of the leaders to follow-up the initial battle and continue the effort to defeat the enemy. Nineteenth-century military theorists Antoine Henri de Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz advised that the victorious army in battle should always pursue the army in retreat.[2] In the aftermath of large American Civil War battles, both armies were typically exhausted and hampered by mass casualties. At times, both armies were logistically incapable of resupplying, maintaining communications over long distances, or keeping open potentially necessary retreat routes. Politicians, under constant pressure from both the public and contending political opponents, rarely appreciated the reality of conditions in the field. Noe adds a dimension of interpretation that makes military leaders' decisions not to follow-up with pursuing attacks appear less like cowardice and more like judicious decisions based upon realistic post-battle logistics.[3]

Civil War historians should also give deeper consideration to the extent that adverse environmental conditions and relentless exposure to weather extremes constantly weakened the physical fitness of soldiers. These conditions contributed to the rampant spread of endemic diseases that continuously drained both armies of manpower, which severely constrained the numbers of effective combatants that both sides were able to employ. In light of Noe's painstaking effort to elucidate the critical variables of climate and weather in *The Howling Storm*, Civil War historians should seriously reevaluate wartime leadership and the course of military matters.

Noe provides comprehensive coverage of military campaigns across the time and space of the Civil War. He effectively treats weather conditions as a "third combatant" demonstrating how deep muddy roads, conditions of harsh cold or heat, exhaustive and debilitating marching in wetness or choking dust, and frequent lack of basic supplies such as clothing, shoes, coats, shelters and adequate food impacted military operations. The examination of these variables is well done. *The Howling Storm* will be beneficial to historians seeking a comprehensive overview of the role of weather and climate in the military history of the Civil War. The integration of weather extremes with soldiers, animals and wagons deeply mired in muck provides an innovative perspective on this well-known history.

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[2] Carl von Clausewitz, "On War," J. J. Graham, Translator, in *Strategy Six Pack* (Staten Island, NY: Enhanced Media Publishing, 2015), 389-398 (Book 4, Chapters 12 and 13). Clausewitz even stated: "Still more rarely has the weather any decisive influence, and it is mostly only by fog that it plays a part," 291 (Book 2, Chapter 2, Section 33). Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill, Translators (Malmsebury, UK: Apostrophe Books, 2013), Chapter 5, Article 38.

[3] Beringer et al., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1986).