BOOK REVIEWS


Perhaps no battle has been the subject of as much historical second guessing as the climactic struggle on the first three days of July, 1863, and with the approach of the centenary of the battle, the flood of Gettysburg literature has, if anything, been accelerated. Drawing on his experience as a soldier in two world wars and employing the techniques of the professional writer, Bellah depicts the battle from the viewpoint of the common soldier and the more or less obscure minor officer. Making use of numerous excerpts from some forty-five eyewitness accounts of the combat, the author reconstructs the action, hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute, of the three-day battle and the events that led up to it.

Apart from opinions which rarely fail to be controversial, there is little in the book that will impress the Civil War specialist as being new or original. Moreover, the author's treatment of controversial themes suffers from the fact that his research has apparently not brought him in contact with some of the more significant works pertaining to his subject, such as Douglas Freeman's masterly biography of General Lee, Haskell Cleaves' Meade of Gettysburg, Kenneth Williams' authoritative Lincoln Finds a General, and the indispensable resource of all Civil War military historians, the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.

Some of the more basic questions that Bellah raises have to do with the performance of the Union General Howard's ill-fated Eleventh Corps on the first day of the battle, the question of whether Gettysburg could have been turned into a decisive Confederate victory on the afternoon of that same first day, the almost consistent failure of Longstreet to carry out Lee's attack orders on both the second and third days of the struggle, the loose character of the Confederate command system, the wild goose chase of Jeb Stuart and his four brigades of Confederate cavalry through Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania at a time when he was vitally needed to screen the march northward of Lee's army and provide intelligence of the movements of the Army of the Potomac, and the relative responsibility of Meade and Sickles for the latter's inexpert handling of the Union Third Corps. In some cases the author suggests answers to questions
like these, but detailed analysis is lacking. In discussing Longstreet's strange behavior bordering on insubordination, for example, Bellah exhibits no awareness of the fundamental difference between Lee and Longstreet with regard to the conduct of the campaign, making it appear rather that Longstreet's inanition was due to lack of understanding of what was expected of him or even to the fact that Lee and his other corps commanders were Virginians whereas Longstreet was not. Again at the point where he mentions the cessation of Union counterbattery fire that preceded Pickett's charge on the Third Day, Bellah offers without confirmatory evidence the hypothesis that it was a ruse on the part of the Union high command to convey the misleading impression that the Federal ammunition supply was exhausted. The real reason for the silence of the Federal batteries is somewhat less bizarre: Federal ammunition was running low, and at the very time Union artillery chief Henry Hunt issued his order for cease fire, couriers from General Meade were speeding in his direction carrying orders to the same effect from the commanding general. Particularly questionable is the characterization of the cavalry action of July 3rd as "the largest... cavalry battle that was ever fought in the Western Hemisphere [sic] ..." (pp. 185-6). Even if the Civil War alone is considered, Brandy Station rather than Gettysburg stands out as the largest scale cavalry action.

Although the author does not stress the fact, the performance of Pennsylvanians figures prominently in the Gettysburg story, gloriously and otherwise. As a counterweight to the splendid achievement of Pennsylvania generals such as Meade, Hancock, and Reynolds was the collapse of Alexander Webb's Philadelphia brigade at the height of Pickett's charge threatening but not resulting in a Confederate breakthrough. And one of the closing incidents of the battle on July 3rd was the successful flight shortly before dark of a Confederate picket, allegedly of Pittsburgh origin, across the open space between the lines to the Union lines on Cemetery Hill. Apparently he was a Mississippi steamboatman who while drunk in New Orleans in 1861 had been impressed into the Confederate army and had been trying to escape ever since.

Soldiers' Battle is useful somewhat in the same way that the Miers and Brown volume on the Gettysburg campaign is in bringing together various eyewitness accounts of the battle that would otherwise not be readily available to the general reader. It does not, however, represent a scholarly treatment of the battle which in
Bellah's opinion neither side won, and perhaps was not intended to be.

Chatham College  
J. Cutler Andrews

*Lewis Wetzel, Indian Fighter. The Life and Times of a Frontier Hero.* By C. B. Allman. (New York: The Devon-Adair Company, 1961. $5.00.)

Cecil B. Hartley, in *The Life of Lewis Wetzel,* published in 1860, makes these statements: "Unfortunately for the memory of Wetzel, no reliable account of him has ever been published. The present generation knows little of his personal history, save as gathered from the exaggerated pages of romance, or the scarcely less painted traditions of the day" (page 15 of the 1860 edition). After reading the 1961 edition of C. B. Allman's *Lewis Wetzel, Indian Fighter,* the reviewer believes that the original statements by Hartley still hold true.

The tone of this book is set at the beginning by nineteen stanzas of uncomfortable poetry — a kind of Guest-calypso amalgam ("Stout-Hearted Lewis Wetzel" by Flohus B. Pimpton). The final sour note is sounded when nineteen more stanzas of a third-rate ballad are printed at the end. Between the two ballads Mr. Allman attempts to appeal to all types of readers — genealogists, historians, farmers, and children. The natural result is confusion. The initial slanting of *Lewis Wetzel, Indian Fighter* may be explained by the fact that it originally ran as a serial in *The Pennsylvania Farmer* in 1931. Much of the material is here for the construction of a good biography, but this material has not been properly organized, substantiated, or evaluated. The problems engendered in writing the life of a man who was a legend in his own day are formidable, but good biography must separate legend and fact. This was not done. I do not feel that Mr. Allman wished to deceive anyone, but more care should have been taken with notes and credits.

A prime example of Mr. Allman's failure to name the source of an important statement is on page 187 of his book. Here the author states that Wetzel spent four months with the Lewis and Clark Expedition — "They sent a messenger to him and he finally consented to join them" but he "came back home because the trip was too slow and not exciting enough for him." This reviewer was unable to find...