

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Mitchell essay "Perseverance"

Source: McPherson For Cause and Comrades

C17

The Civil War as a holy cause for both sides

During the Civil War they never heard of such terms as "battle fatigue." "shell shock," "psychiatric casualties." and the label "post-traumatic distress" that surfaced after the Vietnam War.

We know enough about modern warfare today about how men respond to combat after a prolonged period of fighting and just time in the war zone. The lesson in WW II was that after about 90 days on the line the best men cracked.

Studies of modern armies show that if that army or units of that army experience the loss of one-third of its strength in two back to back engagements that this psychologically wrecks this army as a fighting unit. The only thing to do is take it off the line for R & R. It has ceased to be an effective force in the field.

Here is a scenerio that applies to the Civil War on both the Richmond-Petersburg front in 1864-1865.

To a lesser degree, but nonetheless true, it applies to Sherman's invading force in the West and the Confederate defenders in 1864-65 also. While the fighting was less heavy, both armies were subjetced to strenuous marching and maneuvering than was the case with the Grant and Lee's forces in the East.

And yet they did not crack wide open. The Union never did; while the Confederates did but not before savagely punishing the Union armies, especially in the East.

Add here as far as the Confederates were concerned--the lack of food (half-rations), the weather, shortage of every thing (except ammunition), lice, fleas, chiggers, letters from home, camp diseases, etc.

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OTF

The Union side:

1. A key to the determination of the Union and dedication to the CAUSE--that is Union (and for many the end of slavery) reflected in the re-enlistment of the volunteers of 1861. When their time was up in 1864 some 136,000 re-uped, while 100,000 decided they had enough and stacked arms and went home. Still this was more than 50% of the original volunteers. Without them the Union efforts to end the war would have crashed. As MCP points out the substitutes, bounty-men, and conscripts were not thought very highly of by Union officers and the men in the ranks. Most could not be counted upon.

In doing the math, it is clear that the 180,000 black soldiers were essential to make up the losses of the 100,000 Union men who left the ranks. (I think One out of every 8 Blue bellies in the seige of Petersburg was a black trooper).

Have to account for the enducements that the Union offered for re-enlistment: the \$400.00 bonus (with state and local bonuses); the 36 day furloughs; the promise that if 2/3s of a regiment re-up that the fegment would stay in tact--maintain the unit bonding that grew up among men who had confronted the elephant for three years.

But it had to be more than this.

2. A second indicator was the Election of 1864. Here was a referendum on the Union war and its war aims. An overwhelming majorit of Union soldiers saw it that way.

A striking majority of Union troops who could vote by asentee ballots--some 78%, compaed with only 53% of the civilian vote in 1864 went to Lincoln. This was all the more remakable because 40 to 45% of the Union army voting in 1864 had been Democrats (or came from Democratic families) in 1860, and many of these were from the slave-holding border states.

In voting for Lincoln they were all aware of what it meant: That the war would continue until one side or the othr prevailed. For a year, two years, . . . as long as it would take.

This is a dramatic affirmation of why the Union had the heaviest battalions. Heaviest, in the sense that Mitchell uses this term, in will power and perseverance.

The war for these men had become a holy cause. That cause was Union and freedom.