

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Mitchell essay "Perseverence"
Contra Linderman

Source: McPherson. For Cause and Comrades (p.168)

Recall Linderman's assertion that after the initial enthusiasm and earnestness of the soldiers on both sides (full of pride and conviction about the rightness of their respective cause) the face of war with its harrowing adventures and ghastly moratily eventually harden them into skeptics and they were overcome with "harsh disillusionment" that "caused them to abandon whatever idealism they brought into the conflict by the later part of the war. Then they fought not for home and cause but only to stay alive and get the job done so they could go home.

Linderman's assertions always bothered me. It never explained satisfactorily why so many on both sides stuck this horrendous war to the end. Why, in fact, the war lasted as long as it did.

I always suspected there was a strain of presentism in his analysis and interpretation. (That his writing was influenced by the American soldiers experience in Vietnam and not the Civil War).

Perhaps he was over influenced by accounts of WW I and WW II by writers like Ernest Hemingway and Paul Fussell (a combat infantry lieutenant in the ETO) who both in their accounts of these 20th century wars were eloquent in their efforts to inculcate in readers a view that war was simply murder, there was no way of refining it with words like "glory," "courage," "sacrifice," "valor," and "sacred cause." This was the rhetoric of statesmen and politicians who did their best to make the worst appear a better cause, which is what we have come to expect from those who send young men off to die in strange lands.