



Burnside's Boys: The Union's Ninth Corps and the Civil War in the East

By Darin Wipperman

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Reviewed by LTC (Retired) Jesse McIntyre III

Darin Wipperman — journalist, lecturer, and author of *First for the Union: Life and Death in a Civil War Army Corps from Antietam to Gettysburg* — continues his remarkable study of Civil War military history in *Burnside's Boys: The Union's Ninth Corps and Civil War in the East*. In a remarkably well-researched volume, Wipperman draws on a range of primary source material — personal accounts, Confederate and Union records, and military correspondence — in providing an unprecedented view of the Ninth Corps' role during the Civil War.

Wipperman introduces us to the Ninth Corps' key leaders and regiments during the Carolina Expedition. He masterfully uses Soldiers' letters and unit correspondence in painting a picture of units and personnel. Wipperman provides readers realistic descriptions of Civil War campaigning and bivouacking as well as the horrors of combat. Readers will feel the fatigue of conducting endless marches, fording streams, and bivouacking without cover in the pouring rain and relentless heat, all while experiencing the pangs of hunger and thirst in worn-out uniforms and shoes.

Burnside's Boys goes beyond describing the Ninth Corps' role in the Civil War, however; it is a case study on leadership. General George McClellan's focus on gaining glory for himself at the sacrifice of winning decisively on the battlefield makes him the central villain in the story. His inability to convey clear and concise orders to subordinates, indecisiveness, and vanity may have been more detrimental to the Army of the Potomac than the Army of Northern Virginia. Wipperman reminds us that there was enough blame to go around as subordinate commanders were often slow or failed in executing orders, while others simply failed in gaining an understanding of what was to be accomplished. As a result, Ninth Corps units went into headlong assaults against fortified Confederate Army positions in uncoordinated attacks. The Union Army missed several opportunities in defeating General Lee while experiencing horrific losses in the process.

Wipperman argues McClellan's biggest failure was a missed opportunity at Antietam to defeat Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. McClellan had received a copy of Lee's Special-Order Number 191 that laid out the Army of Northern Virginia's plan for the Maryland Campaign. Overestimating the size of Lee's Army and fearing a Confederate counterattack, McClellan failed to seize the initiative in attacking Lee's army or reinforcing success during the battle. His final mistake was allowing Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia to withdraw unmolested back to Virginia.

The strength of *Burnside's Boys: The Union's Ninth Corps and the Civil War in the East* is Wipperman's extensive research, perspectives of the common soldier, and a writing style that conveys the privation and experiences of campaigning during the Civil War. Readers may find the few maps depicting unit movements a challenge at times; this is especially true for Ninth Corps major engagements. This work provides

a comprehensive examination of the Ninth Corps' role in the Civil War, and I recommend it to any historian or reader with an interest on the subject.