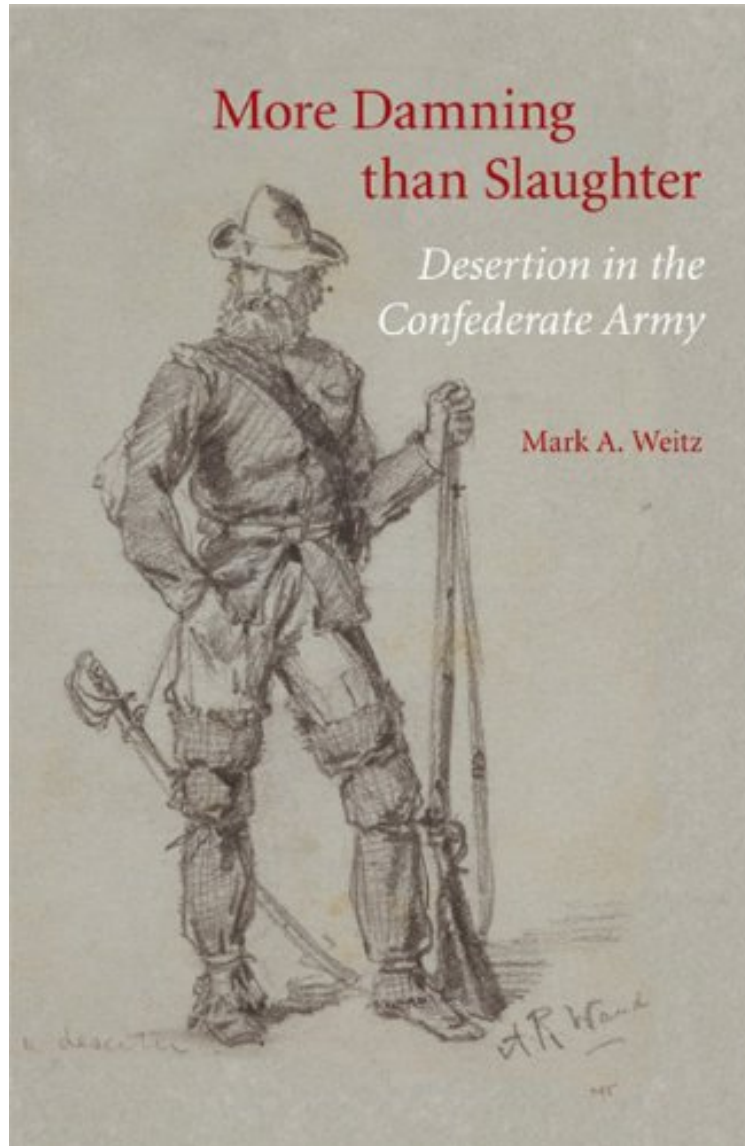


[FREE] More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army

# More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army

Mark A. Weitz

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**Mark A. Weitz : More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army:

0 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Excellent TransactionBy Anthony ColeBook arrived promptly and in the conditon advertised. I would purchase from this vendor again.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Excellent and thought provoking book.By C. A. TemmIt often seems that no real new information can be found on the

Civil War as it is THE most written about event in our nation's short history. Mark Weitz however has done just that, taken a subject, and wrote an authoritative tome on it. Desertion is a subject that has seen little serious investigation done, especially on the Confederate side, for several decades. This is a subject that has deserved more work, especially for its effects on the fledgling Confederate nation. In the past, desertion has been at best covered on how it affected states (Alabama gets a very good book covering its trials on the home front in "McMillian's Disintegration of a Confederate State") and seldom anything approaching a war wide study. Weitz has done this and in a convincing way to show how desertion became a cyclic monster feeding and growing as it was either ignored or coddled by both state and federal (CS government) entities and the onset of lawlessness on the home front encouraged it. With few exceptions, officers/officials in the CS government tended to be at least sympathetic towards deserters, witness the constant offers of pardon/blanket amnesty that the CS trotted out every few months. While there were officers who shot deserters, they were few in the over all context of the war. The CS had thousands, if not tens of thousands of men who were multiple deserters. Captured or cajoled to return to duty, these men often wasted little time before deserting again. It was a problem that saw armies of deserters in many regions of the South by the end of the war. This was despite, desperately needed CSA soldiers being sent to root out deserters throughout the South during the war. Weitz argues that many of these men deserted because of the broken social contract between them and those that stayed at the home front; especially the rich and government officials who were to ensure that soldiers' families not starve or suffer while the men were away fighting. Other factors he argues such as the loss of the border states (retreats from them saw a huge wave of desertion), decisive defeats in 1862 (it is believed a majority of paroled Confederates may have deserted while at home awaiting exchange), the Conscription Act of 1862, oppression of home front Unionists/neutrals, tax in kind impressment, growing perception of a 'rich man's war, poor man's fight'; all contributed to the outflow of men from the Confederate armies--many with their arms and equipment. These men, allied directly with local Unionists, or lawlessly preying on anyone nearby, or simply resisting any form of the Confederacy they encountered, made up a third front. This third front was one the Confederacy never really paid much attention to until it was too late. Between local/state courts invalidating conscription calls or the inability of state/local forces to control what in many areas was battalion to brigade sized forces, the Confederacy saw strangled commerce and an inability to extract recruits or resources. At the same time it made soldiers at the distant fronts more concerned about families in what was supposed to be safe areas. All of this, long before Federal forces ever got anywhere near such places. The numbers are hard to argue with though some may have cause to debate calling stragglers or men coming in late from leave deserters as Weitz does, but it is impossible to argue that even a temporary loss of these men hurt Confederate war making abilities. Weitz also believes that a more severe policy of shooting more deserters could have forestalled enough of these men from leaving. In my opinion, it was far more likely to have ignited more armed mutinies instead. Though expensive, this book is well worth the cost for anyone even remotely serious about this war. Heavily documented, well written, and interlaced with many first person vignettes, this book has a place on one's shelf. Hopefully, someone will do a similar job on Federal forces soon.

15 of 16 people found the following review helpful.  
Good Ideas well supported  
By James W. Durney  
Few images are more enduring than the Confederate infantryman, clad in rags, blanket roll, slouch hat, dirty beyond belief with an immaculate rifle in hand. Standing without fear against long odds, he endures cold and hunger for "the cause" fighting to the bitter end. This book is NOT an attack on that image, rather it documents that there are multiple images in every great event and all of them can be true. Mr. Weitz has written a very readable, intelligent and thought provoking account of desertion and draft dodging in the Confederacy. He validates the image of the Confederate infantryman while showing us that other images are equally valid and need to be understood. The heart of the book is a year-by-year account of desertion in each theater coupled with the military and political response. Every student of Civil War history knows about how understanding most armies were of "French Leave". In addition, we know that the South was not as solid as legend suggests but contained significant pockets of "Tories" throughout the war. That is a simple and somewhat straightforward story that hardly seems worthy of a book. If this was all that the author had to give, I would have been unable to finish the book. First, we have a discussion of why non-slave owning White subsistence farmers are willing to fight and their understanding of the "contract" with the CSA. This is a very interesting subject that the author deftly handles, giving us a look into rural Southern life lacking in many books. This contract' while unwritten but understood forms the foundation upon which these men build their service. They leave expecting the government to care for and protect their homes. This includes seeing that their family is not in want. Documentation shows that the men, the states and Richmond fully understood this unwritten contract with each party aware of their obligations. This discussion might be one of the best explanations of why the CSA succeeded thru 1862 that I have found. A second very strong point is the discussion of how men felt about areas that were not "home". This becomes critical as the war progresses but the standard civilian view and fear of armies translates into feelings that civilians in [insert state name here] are not supporting the cause and the fighting men. This perception of no support leads to alienation as men decide that this area is not home. For a nation based on the idea of home, this decision excludes the area from the nation. In 1861 desertion is not a major problem Homesickness, "what have I done?" and problems within the unit are the driving forces. The military is very tolerant of desertion and most deserters face reduced charges when and if they return. "French leave" and straggling

are accepted and returning to your unit takes care of the problem. This toleration and the requirement of returning to the original unit become fixed ideas in the military and the governments. Later, these policies cause real problems but no one seems to be able to fully reject them and make a fresh start. 1862 is a critical year for the Confederacy, seeing conscription, inflation, shortages, war profiteering, bloody battles and loss of territory. Desertion becomes a major problem, links with draft dodging and receives active support from the new Union government in Tennessee. As homes disappear behind Union lines, men can go home free of military service by "swearing the oath". Tennessee is very active enticing men to leave CSA service, come home and sit out the war. In time, Grant becomes involved by exempting Confederate deserters and draft dodgers from the Union conscription laws. As the problems grow, response is mired in the policies of 1861 and the issue of state's rights. One state court rules that catching deserters and draft dodgers is a national issue and the state cannot participate. Beset by internal problems, with Union armies advancing and bloodier battles, in 1863 the dam breaks. Desertion reaches epic proportions in every army in spite of amnesty proclamations, general orders and a few executions. Worse, not all men can get home and many join together to survive. These organized bands are larger, well trained, experience better armed and able to overwhelm local militia. They prey off the civilian population, providing a haven for resistance to taxes and the draft. In some areas, these men control the law making it impossible to collect taxes or to arrest them. The author does an excellent job of linking this to the earlier question of what these men considered a nation and how they felt about areas outside of "home". Once again, local Union commanders take advantage of the situation providing arms and supplies in some areas. In other areas, a 3-way fight develops between these bands, the local militia and the Union army. Trapped are Southern civilians and the men that have stayed in the army. The contract is broken forcing them to make hard decision based on their true loyalties and responsibilities. The author fully captures the pain this choice caused and how these men are forced into this decision. Government response is inadequate and might be called wishful thinking. In the face of appeals from both the military and the states, the government continues the failed policies of 1861 with few exceptions. The book contains examples where a local commander is able to produce results by breaking up bands and capturing men. However, requirements for men at the front, politics and policies never managed to produce a solution that is more than temporary. By 1864, the South has lost the war. More men see this and respond by going home, often behind Union lines. The numbers are surprising even for a student of the war. What is often passed off as "French Leave" or AWOL is really a loss of manpower the South cannot afford while being unable to implement policies that will stop it. This unique and valuable study needs to be in the library of every serious student of the war. While a scholarly text, it is an interesting, informative and enjoyable read.

*More Damning than Slaughter* is the first broad study of desertion in the Confederate army. Incorporating extensive archival research with a synthesis of other secondary material, Mark A. Weitz confronts a question never fully addressed until now: did desertion hurt the Confederacy?

"Mark A. Weitz's study . . . aims to fill in one of the last remaining gaps in Civil War historiography."—Publishers Weekly